MANORAMA

TELL ME WHY

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100+ FACTS

ENDANGERED ANIMALS

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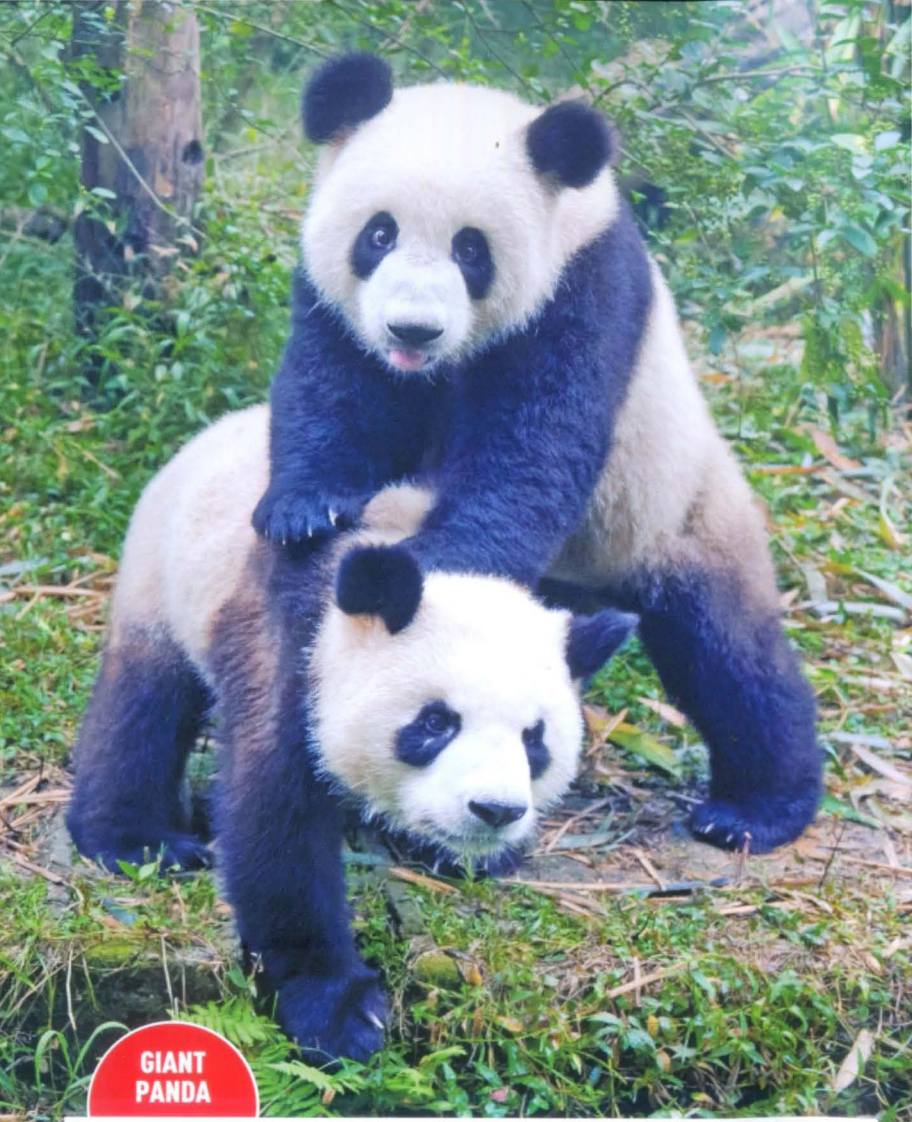
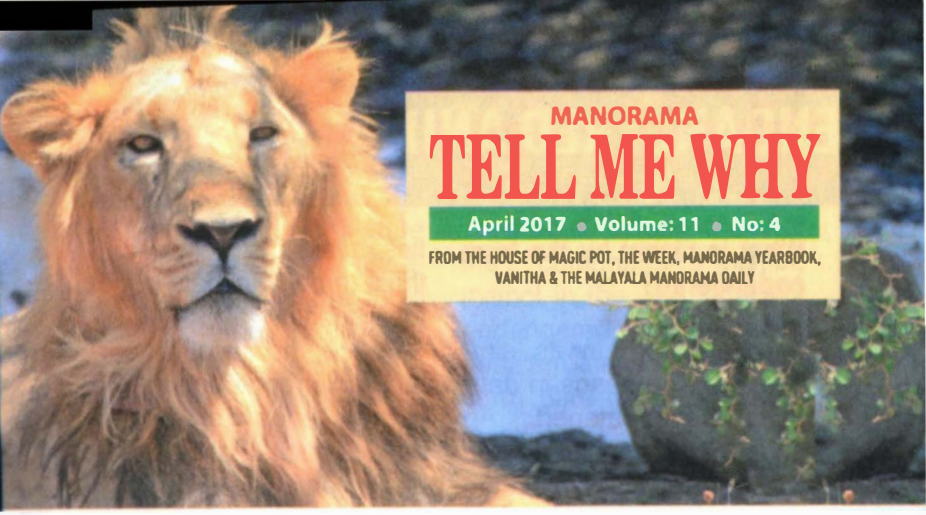


GIANT PANDA

The Giant Panda, once categorised as endangered by the IUCN Red List, is no longer so. It is now placed in the 'Vulnerable' category, much to the relief of Giant Panda lovers. Chinese government's effective conservation programmes helped in its increase in population. But if its habitat is not well protected, this animal may again become endangered.



MANORAMA
TELL ME WHY
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FROM THE HOUSE OF MAGIC POT, THE WEEK, MANORAMA YEARBOOK, VANITHA & THE MALAYALA MANORAMA DAILY

ALMOST GONE...

Man is undoubtedly the most successful species ever to inhabit Earth. He is proud of his exceptional intellectual abilities. But shockingly, Man, who prides himself on being a rational being, is the only species that ruthlessly kills animals around him.

The Asiatic lion is one such animal that is on the verge of extinction, because of Man's unreasonable killing. Not only Asiatic lions, but many other animals have either become endangered, or are on the verge of extinction.

Yet all hope is not lost, as Man is becoming increasingly aware that each and every animal is a vulnerable part of, Nature's grand design. Efforts are on all over the world to protect animals that are on the brink of extinction.

This issue of Tell Me Why will introduce you to some animals that are endangered.

Logo of IUCN Red List

ENDANGERED ANIMALS

What is meant by the term endangered?

Endangered, in its simplest sense, means in danger, or threatened. An endangered species is one which has its population reducing at an alarming rate. The threat could be so serious that the animal or plant is likely to become extinct.

However, If it's lucky enough, it can be saved through conservationist activities. Mountain gorillas, Iberian lynx, North Atlantic right whales, and Siberian tigers are some of the best examples for endangered animals.

There are always many reasons for a species to become endangered. As we know, humans are the most vicious predators of non-humans. To satisfy his greed, Man makes changes in the environment, modifies its basic structure, and thus, throws animals out of their habitats.

Hence the most important factor contributing to a species' endangered existence is habitat loss caused by human activities.

Besides this, all animals are vulnerable to diseases, or predation by other animals. This sometimes results in the permanent disappearance of species.

Under Water

Freshwater ecosystems constitute one of the most endangered habitats in the world, and are home to more than 100,000 known species of plants and animals.

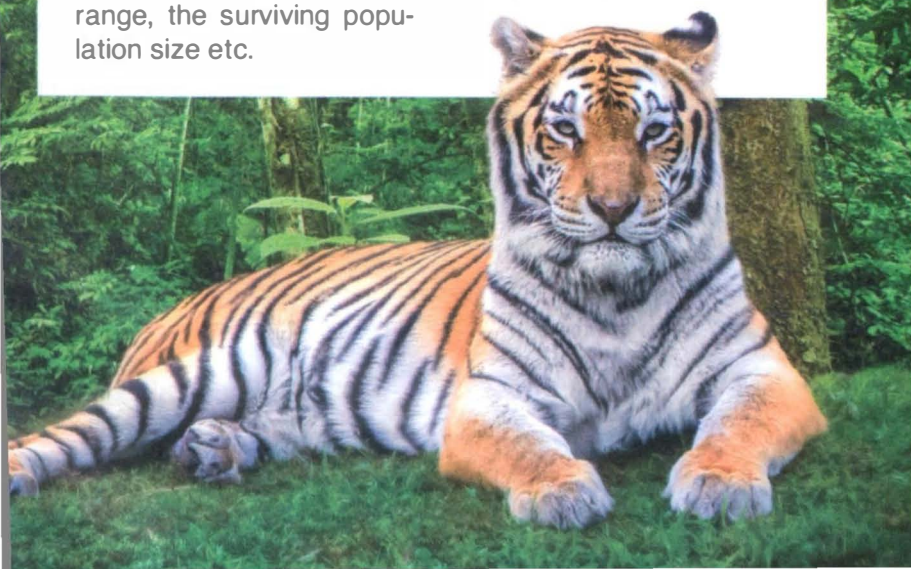
What is the IUCN Red List?

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species is the most detailed directory on the conservation status of plants and animals in the world. It is also called the Red Data Book, and was introduced in 1964.

The Red List is prepared on the basis of an assessment system that uses certain criteria to understand the risks of a given species. The criteria includes- the rate of population decline, geographical range, the surviving population size etc.

After a thorough study using these tools, the status of a species is determined. They could belong to any of the categories- extinct, extinct in the wild, critically endangered, vulnerable, near threatened, least concern, data deficient or not evaluated.

Every five years, scientists check the conservation status. The Red List is subsequently updated with new data. This way, the information gathered helps governments and other agencies to prioritize their conservation efforts.



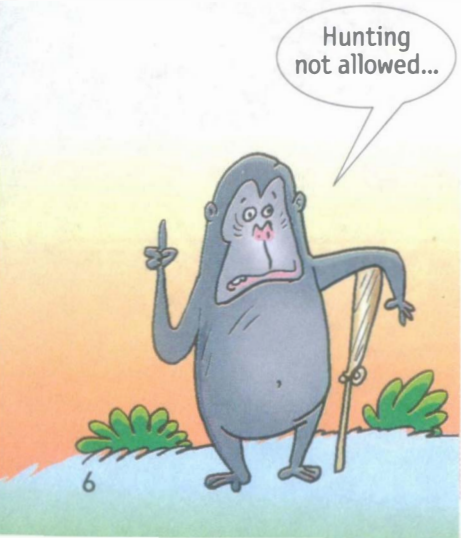
Eastern Lowland Gorilla

Why is the Eastern lowland gorilla considered to be an endangered species?

The Eastern lowland gorilla is a subspecies of gorilla that can be found mainly in the rain forests of the Congo in Africa. They are also spotted in the Kahuzi-Biega and Maiko National Parks, and their adjacent forests, the Tayna Gorilla Reserve, the Usala forest, and on the Itombwe Massif.

The other name of this subspecies is 'Grauer's gorilla'. It is the largest of the gorilla sub species with a huge body weighing up to 250 kg. Until the mid 1990s, there were around 17,000 of these gorillas alive. But recent surveys show that the population has come down to around 4000.

One of the main reasons for the decline in the population of the Eastern lowland gorilla is illegal poaching. This means hunting, capturing, or killing of animals. Yet other reasons



include the trade of their body parts, destruction of habitat due to mining, agricultural expansion, logging etc.

What makes the red panda rare?

The red panda is a mammal that lives mainly in the mountains of Nepal, Northern Myanmar and in Central China. They are also spotted in the North Eastern Indian states like Assam and Sikkim. Like many animals, red pandas are also endangered due to many reasons.

Slightly larger than a domestic cat in size, red pandas have markings of both pandas and raccoons. They are known to be very solitary, but are skillful, and stay most of the time on trees.

The main reason for the decline in the red panda population is the loss of nesting trees and bamboo. The latter is their main diet, but red pandas also eat a variety of other foods like fruits, flowers, seeds etc.

Apart from the destruction of their habitat, these animals are also trapped and killed in large numbers so that their fur can be used to make hats.

With their population less than 10,000, red pandas have been listed as 'endangered' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Red Panda

Why is a Tasmanian devil special?

Tasmanian devils are small-sized carnivorous animals found in the state of Tasmania in Australia. Like many other animals, these animals too presently face the threat of extinction.

The uncommon name 'devil' is believed to have arisen from the animal's ferocious screech, and tendency to eat carcass meat. A devil's jaws are powerful enough to crush our bones! However, a large number of them are dying due to a contagious form of cancer that is affecting their species. Known as the devil facial tumour disease (DFTD), it is a rare

Tasmanian Devil

Why should the Siberian tiger be conserved?

The Siberian or the Amur tiger, is a tiger subspecies that lives mainly in the Southeast corner of Russia in the Sikhote-Alin mountain range, east of the Amur River. These were once found in Northern China, Mongolia, and the Korean peninsula too, but not much anymore. This is because of the sharp decline in their population, due to human activities.

These tigers are characterised by their aggressive behaviour. They are powerful hunters that travel many kilometres to find preys like wild boars, or elk.

The main reason for the decline in the population of Siberian tigers is poaching. They are primarily poached for their fur and body parts

tumour large in size, which forms on the face and neck of the animal. The disease was first seen in 1996. Experts have discovered that the cancer transmits from one devil to another through bites.

There are many programmes being conducted by the government to reduce the impact and spread of the tumour. The famous one is the 'Save the Tasmanian Devil Programme'.

Twitter in Forest!

In 'wild' terms, twittering refers to the sound produced by red pandas. So it wouldn't be wrong to say there is twitter in forests too!

for money, or to be used in traditional Chinese medicine. To control this, the Chinese government declared the use of tiger bone illegal in 1993.

However, there are other reasons too, including habitat loss.

Amur Tiger

Ill-fated Big Cats

The tiger family consists of many subspecies including the Siberian tiger, Sumatran tiger, Bengal tiger, South China tiger, Malayan tiger and Indochinese tiger. Some species are endangered, while some others are already extinct.

What makes the Bengal tiger an endangered animal?

The Bengal tiger or the royal Bengal tiger, is a subspecies in the tiger family found predominantly in parts of India, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.

This wild cat is known for its power and strength. It mainly hunts animals like wild boars, deer, water buffaloes, and sometimes, rhino calves.

However, despite their strength, Bengal tigers too, are close to being extinct. The main reasons are massive poaching and habitat loss. The tigers are killed for their skin and body parts, including bones and teeth for money, and medicinal purposes. Habitat loss, which is a reason for the extinction of many animals, has caused tigers to come down to nearby villages in search of prey. This has increasingly led to a conflict between Man and tigers, as a result of which, the latter gets mostly killed.

Bengal Tiger

Bengal tigers in the Sundarbans are the only tigers that inhabit mangrove forests.

Why is the Asiatic lion in the IUCN Red List?

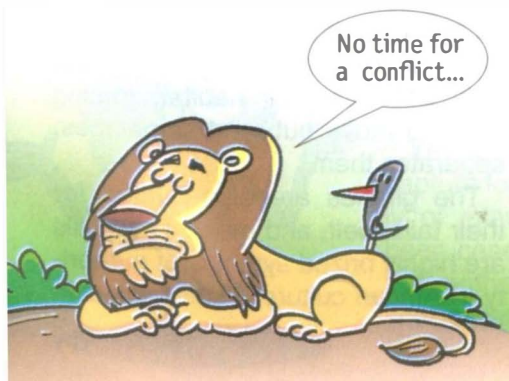
Asiatic lions are among the endangered animals that face the risk of extinction due to human activities. They are also known as Indian lions.

Asiatic Lion

Asiatic lions are found only in the Gir forests of Gujarat today and the approximate population here is between 400-600. The government, and many animal welfare organisations have worked hard to conserve this dying species for the past two decades.

As a result, the population of Asiatic lions in the Gir Forest National Park has increased. These animals are still vulnerable to epidemics. Yet another reason that contributed to their decline is poaching. Because some of the lions live outside the protected areas, they rarely enter nearby villages, causing conflicts with human beings.

The lion is one of five big cat species in India, along with Bengal tiger, Indian leopard, snow leopard and clouded leopard.



West African Giraffe

Why is the West African giraffe a rare sight?

The West African giraffe, or Niger giraffe, is a subspecies of Northern giraffe found predominantly in the Sahel regions of West Africa.

The King

Although the lion is referred to as the 'king of jungle', it does not live there, but in grasslands and plains.

Like many species that are declining in population, the West African giraffe is also facing the threat of being endangered. Experts note that these herbivorous were a common sight across the Sahel and Savanna regions of West Africa until the First World War. But as the human population increased, farming and hunting became widespread and this in turn, affected the giraffes.

However, the main reason attributed to the decline in the giraffe population is the cutting down of trees. This destroys their habitat, forcing them to move out, and sometimes, separates them.

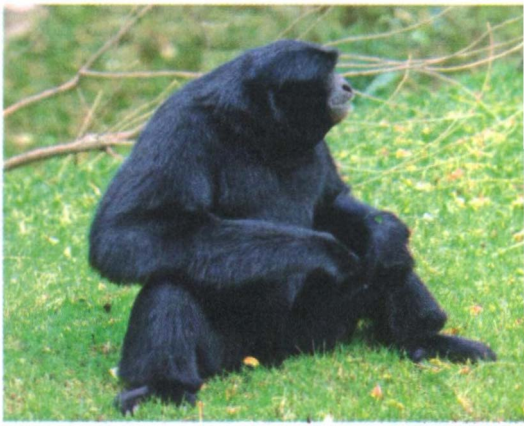
The giraffes are also hunted for their tails, pelt, and meat. Their tails are highly prized symbols of authority in African culture. Their thick skin

has been used for making clothing, shoes, bags, belts, hats and cover for drums, and their hair, for making bracelets, necklaces and other jewellery items among African tribes.

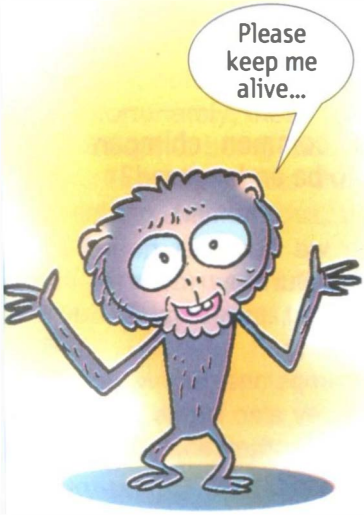
Why is a siamang special?

A siamang is a black-furred ape found in the forests of Malaysia, Sumatra, and Thailand. It is the largest of the gibbons. The arms of a siamang can spread out for as much as 1.5 metres. This makes them very smart brachiators or primates that use an arm-over-arm swinging motion to move from one tree to another.

However, in spite of their smartness and agility, the population of siamangs is shrinking at a scary pace. The major threats faced by the apes include loss and fragmentation of habitat, and capture for the pet trade. The forests inhabited by siamangs are destroyed due to logging, developmental activities etc.



Siamang



Yet another cause of danger is capture for illegal pet trade, especially of infant siamangs. There have been cases when the highly-protective mothers were shot, just to obtain young siamangs for sale.

What makes the Northern quoll special?

A Northern quoll, or a Northern native cat, is a carnivorous animal seen in Australia. It is the smallest of the Australian quoll species, with a body length of around 300 mm, and weight up to 1120 gm.

They are predators that hunt mainly at night, eating small mammals, birds, reptiles and fruits. Historically, the Northern quoll was common across the country, seen in open forests, or woodlands, or rocky areas. However, in the 1990s their population saw a sharp decline.

Over the years, the number of Northern quolls have come down significantly, and this is likely to continue in the immediate future too.

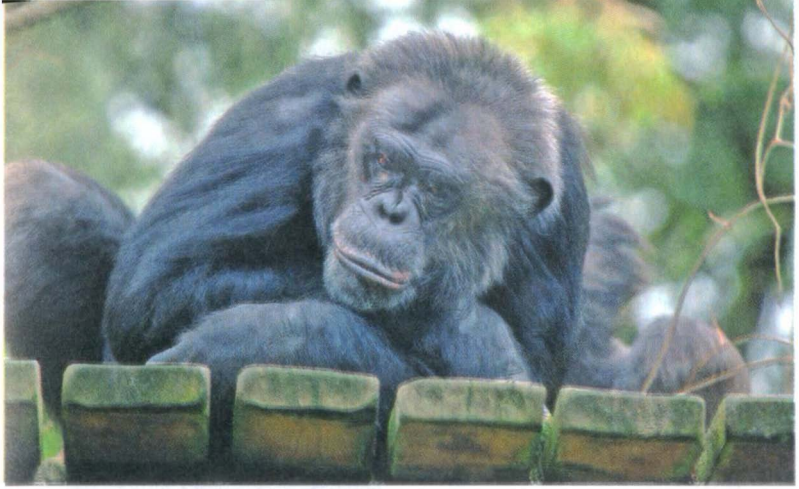
Many factors are attributed to the decline in quoll population. This includes wild fire, attack by wild cats, and poaching. And like in all other cases, destruction of habitat is yet another major problem. Then there is the threat caused by the spread of cane toads. Eating them leads to poisoning, and this has killed a large number of quolls, and other native species.

Northern Quoll

Why is the common chimpanzee considered to be endangered?

Of course we have all heard of chimpanzees. But how many of us have heard that they are endangered? Not many.

Like us, chimps are highly social and caring. They also live to be over 50, unlike many other animals. And



Chimpanzee

guess what? They are the closest cousins to human beings!

Chimpanzees are mostly seen in the plains and forests of Africa. They spend most of their time on treetops, and when they come down, walk on all four legs. They are clever apes that are even capable of using tools even. Chimps are famous as well for catching bugs using sticks, and cracking nuts using rocks.

Unfortunately, these apes too face the threat of being reduced in number. The main risks they face are poaching, habitat loss, and diseases.

Their meat is a primary food source in African countries, and for this reason, poaching has become very rampant in recent years. Besides, infant chimps are sold as pets. Another reason that contributes to the declining chimp population is diseases. The ebola outbreak that killed many humans, also took the lives of thousands of chimpanzees.

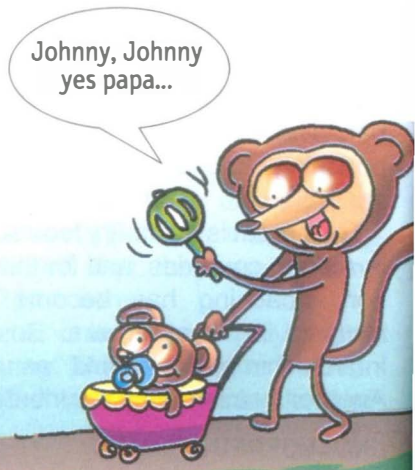
Why is the Western lowland gorilla considered as critically endangered?

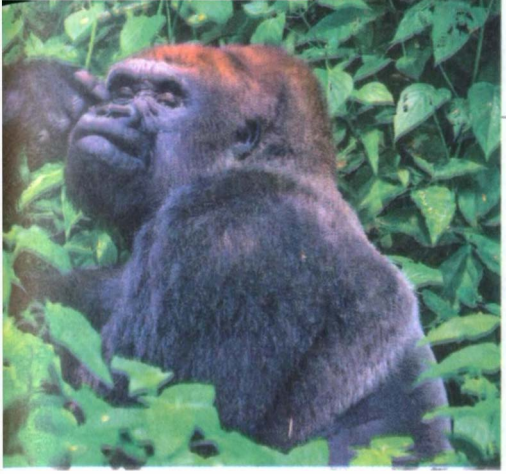
The Western lowland gorilla is the most widespread of all the gorilla subspecies. They are predominantly found in the dense and remote forests of the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea. These gorillas are different from the others by their slightly smaller size, and auburn chests. They have shorter hair, and longer arms too. Like chimpanzees, gorillas too are smart, and they easily learn human sign language.

Although they are found in large numbers, the Western lowland gorillas are still an endangered species. There are no data on the number of gorillas surviving, but it roughly comes to a lakh. As one can guess, some of the main rea-

Why is it said that the Southern woolly lemur is special?

The Southern woolly lemur is a nocturnal animal found in the coastal forests of Southeast Madagascar. They are particularly restricted to the reserves of Andohahela and the area of Sainte Luce. These lemurs mainly eat leaves, buds and sometimes, flowers.





Western Lowland Gorilla

sons for this are illegal poaching, killing, and habitat destruction. The gorillas are killed for the bush meat, or captured for pet trade.

Another reason is the spread of diseases like ebola, which has caused the death of a large number of gorillas and chimpanzees.

Like Chimps, Like Man!

Like human beings, chimpanzees too care deeply for their families. When a mother dies, the older chimps are known to take care of the younger ones. And sometimes, unrelated adult chimps 'adopt' orphaned infants until they grow up!

They are pair-living species, and each group has two to five individuals in them.

In general, Southern woolly lemurs have a very small birth rate, which is one of the reasons for their population decline. However, there are other reasons too, like habitat destruction.

Unfortunately, there is very little information available about the habitat needs of the Southern woolly lemurs. Many studies and research projects are in progress to learn about this subspecies.

Hopefully, they will result in better and effective conservation measures in future, to protect these endangered animals.

Lion-tailed Macaque

Why have the conservation programmes for the lion-tailed macaque resulted in a lot of public interest?

Lion-tailed macaques are one of the most endangered primates of India, seen only in the rain forests of the Western Ghats. Most of them exist as small populations in the evergreen environments of Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. Experts have found out that the Silent Valley in the north of Palakkad, is one place where there is the most viable habitat for this endangered subspecies.

The macaque is quite different in its appearance. It has a silver mane, surrounding the head from the cheeks down to the chin. This gives the monkey its other name, beard ape.

The main threat faced by the macaques is habitat loss, due to deforestation and logging.

However, one can say that macaques are lucky animals compared to other endangered ones. This macaque once saw thousands of supporters in the country standing up to conserve them through a mass cam-

Lion-tailed Macaque

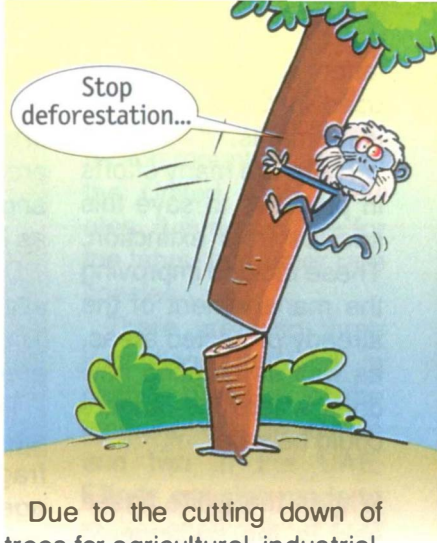
Lion-tailed macaques are found in more than 21 protected areas, and are also safe guarded by Indian law.

paign.This movement was aimed at protecting the Silent Valley Reserve Forest that began in the early 1970s.

In 1984, the Valley was declared as a National Park, making it a permanent habitat for many animals, including lion-tailed macaques.

Why is the purple-faced langur considered as an endangered animal?

The purple-faced langur, or the purple-faced leaf monkey, is a species found only in Sri Lanka. They are long tailed monkeys, mostly brown in colour, with facial whiskers and a very shy nature. For the most of their time, these leaf-eating monkeys live on trees.



Due to the cutting down of trees for agricultural, industrial, and domestic purposes, the lives of langurs have been greatly affected. Like in all cases, their habitats are lost or fragmented, and the animals are separated from each other. This in turn, affects breeding and reproduction.

The langurs are also exploited for their meat and skin. The

Purple-faced Langurs

latter is known to be used in making musical instruments.

There are many efforts in progress to save this species from extinction. These include improving the management of the already protected areas, as well as creating new ones where the langurs could be safe.

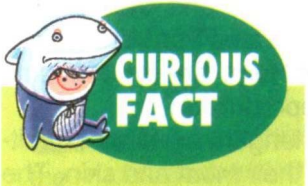
Why is the white nosed saki in the endangered list?

The white-nosed saki is a variety of the bearded-saki, seen in the south-central Amazon rainforests in Brazil. They are also sometimes seen in a small area, east of Bolivia. Wildlife experts and organisations have tagged them as highly endangered.

Despite its name, the animal actually has a red nose and upper lip. The entire body of this saki is covered with shiny black fur.

This species is mainly threatened by habitat destruction and fragmentation. Their range is damaged primarily because of infrastructural development, and also by setting up cattle and soybean farms. Apart from these, sakis are widely hunted for their meat, especially in Rio Tapajos. It is not just for consuming, but also for using as baits for cat traps. The saki's bushy tail is another part which is sold illegally.

Attempts are being made to protect sakis. As per the Brazilian law capture, collection, sale and export of this species are prohibited.



Sound of Cruelty

Purple-faced langurs are killed, in most cases, for their skin, to be used to make drums. This has been seen as one of the reasons for its decline.

What makes the Arabian tahr an endangered animal?

Arabian tahrs are the smallest of the tahr species, endemic to the Hajar Mountains of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Sultanate of

Arabian Tahr

Oman. They are always seen at high elevations, between 1000 and 1800 metres, where rainfall is heavy.

In spite of their small sizes, Arabian tahrs are very strong and agile animals, with heavily built bodies and solid horns. They mainly feed on leaves, fruits, shrubs and grasses, and also depend on a regular supply of water.

Currently, the tahrs are enlisted as endangered by the IUCN Red List. Although there is no exact data on their population, it is said that there are just less than 5000 of them left. The main threats they face include intense grazing, illegal hunting and habitat destruction.

Many efforts have been made since the 1970s to conserve the Arabian tahr species. In 2009, Wadi Wurayah, Fujairah was declared as the first protection mountain area of the United Arab Emirates. It is now home for the tahrs, and other rare species.

There are also three institutions involved in captive breeding of the animals, one in Oman and two in the UAE. Efforts are also made to make people aware of plight of these endangered beings.

Okapi

Why is the Okapi different?

The okapi, which looks like a zebra is in fact, a relative of the giraffe. However, it is much smaller, and shares similarities with deer too. Okapis in general are herbivorous that feed on leaves and buds. The animal is also the national symbol of the Republic of Congo, and appears on the country's banknotes. But, nothing has saved it from the threats of being endangered.

Also known as forest giraffes, okapis are found only in the rainforests of Congo. According to experts, its population has reduced at least 50 percent since 1995 because of poaching and habitat loss. Unregulated mining of diamonds, gold, and other mineral resources that take place in their range is another factor that contributes to the danger the animals face.

Indeed there are laws protecting these endangered animals in Congo, but the number of okapis shows no improvement. The Okapi Wildlife Reserve is one area where they are conserved, but the presence of armed groups in this area pose a different threat. In June 2012, the headquarters of the reserve was attacked by poachers, and six guards along with 14 okapis were killed.

Munch it

Sumatran elephants are herbivorous that munch on about 150 kg of plants and seeds everyday. And that would amount to the weight of two male humans!

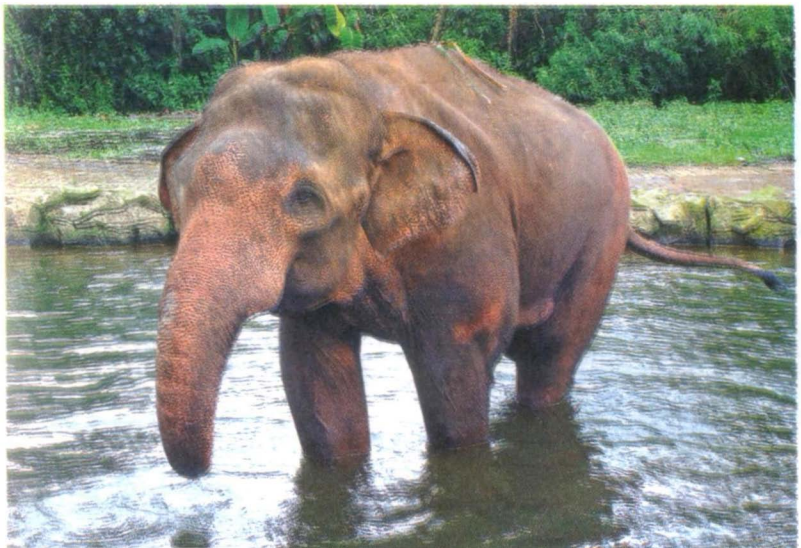
Why is the Sumatran elephant considered endangered?

Sumatran elephants are critically endangered elephants, native to the Indonesian island of Sumatra. They are a subspecies of the Asian elephant. These elephants are known to play an important role in maintaining a healthy forest ecosystem. The reason is because they consume a variety of plants and deposit seeds wherever they go, hence their importance.

Like many others, Sumatran elephants too became critically endangered by 2011. The main reasons for this are loss of habitat, and conflicts with humans.

As a result, the wild animals enter human settlements and cause dam-

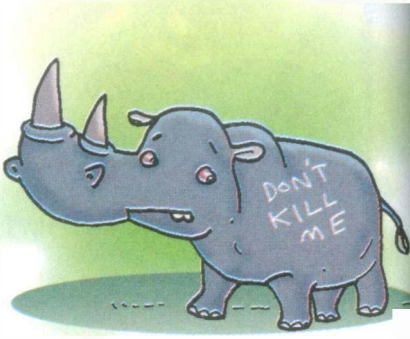
Sumatran Elephant



age. This sparks off a conflict between Man and animal, and ends in the death of the latter.

Apart from these reasons, Sumatran elephants are also hunted for their tusks.

As a measure to conserve these animals, the Tesso Nilo National Park was established in the Riau Province in 2004.



Why is the black rhinoceros an endangered animal?

The black rhinoceros is a species of rhinoceros found mainly in Eastern and Southern Africa. Rhinos in general, are the oldest groups of mammals.

In spite of its name, the animal's colour varies from brown to grey. They are mostly solitary beings that have a sharp hearing, and a keen sense of smell. Their skin is special too, strong enough to protect them from external injuries.

Black Rhinoceros

Most black rhinos have two horns, and sometimes, a third one too. These horns make them profitable targets for illegal trades. It is said that between 1970 and 1992, more than 90 per cent of the black rhinos in Africa were killed, mainly because of poaching.

This dangerous activity is rampant across countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Rhino horns are also taken to Asian countries like Vietnam where they are in great demand. As a result, black rhinoceros have become critically endangered.

Dhole

AMAZING

Unity is strength!

Dholes are highly athletic creatures that possess exceptional skills in teamwork. They hunt in packs, and communicate with each other through whistles and screams.

What makes the dhole special?

The dhole is a wild dog found in Central, South, and Southeast Asia. It is also called the Indian wild dog, Asiatic wild dog, or whistling dog. Dholes are highly social animals that live in large groups. They are famous for taking good care of their little ones, or even cubs that are not their own. Unity and teamwork are other factors that make them different from other wild animals like wolves.

However, it has been seen that over the past decades, dholes have become endangered. The main reasons given for this are habitat destruction, loss of prey etc.

Besides, dholes for a long time have been animals that humans hate. Although they do not attack livestock, a dhole eats its prey before it's dead. This apparently makes the animal infamous and cruel. In many incidents, humans have killed dholes using guns or poison.

Although there is no authentic data, the dhole population is estimated to be less than 2500.

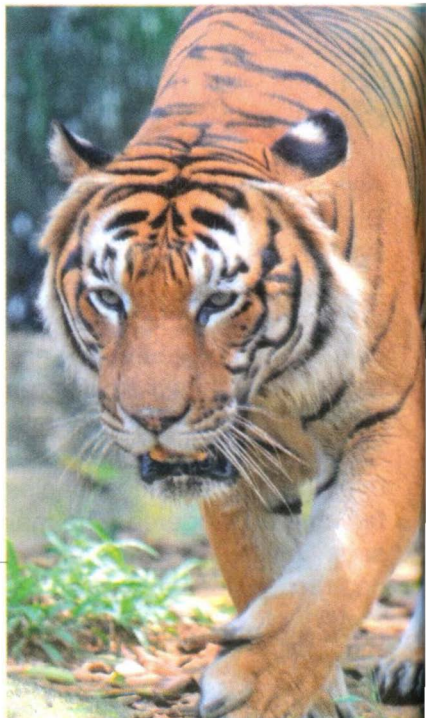
Why is the Malayan tiger an endangered animal?

The Malayan tiger is a subspecies of tiger found in the southern and central parts of the Malay Peninsula, and in the southern tip of Thailand. Unlike other tigers, they mostly live in open woodlands. Deer, wild boar, gaur, tapir, sun bear, and elephant calves are the main food source of these wild animals.

In 2015, the Malayan tigers were classified as critically endangered by the IUCN. This was because their population was estimated to be less than 250, and had declined by more than 25 per cent in seven years.

The main reasons for the fall in the Malayan tiger population are hunting and habitat destruction. The tigers especially are of high demand across markets in Asia, for their bushmeat and bones, which are also used as a sign of wealth, or for making folk medicine.

The Malaysian Conservation Alliance for Tigers (MYCAT), comprising the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), Traffic South-east Asia, Wildlife Conservation Society, and WWF-



Malayan Tiger

Malaysia is a prominent organisation that works towards conserving this subspecies.

What are the threats to Siamese crocodiles?

The name Siamese crocodiles may not be familiar to most of us. They are among the most endangered reptiles in the world today. These fresh water crocodiles were previously found throughout South Asia, in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Malaysia. But today, their surviving population can be seen only in the Mekong River basin and wetlands in Cambodia, and a few other places. Even here, their habitat is fragmented, owing to hunting and human activities.

The main threat to Siamese crocodiles are humans. Aggressive hunting for crocodile skin, conversion of rainforest habitats into agricultural farms, use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers etc have contributed greatly to the declining population of these reptiles. It is said that there are not more than 5000 Siamese crocodiles alive today.

However, the crocodiles are extensively bred and maintained in captivity, in Cambodia, as well as in Thailand. There are also many conservation programmes underway in these two countries, which gives a little hope regarding the future of these endangered crocodiles.

Siamese Crocodile

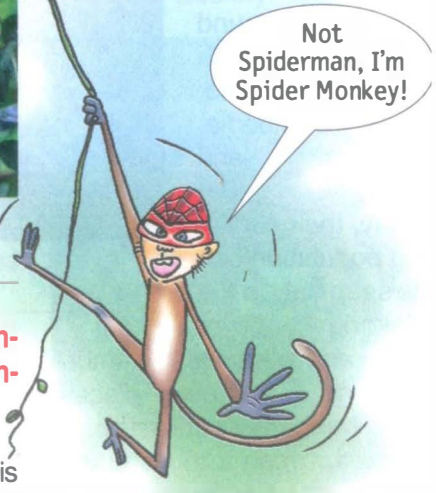
Brown Spider Monkey

Why is the brown spider monkey considered as an endangered animal?

The brown spider monkey is one of the seven species of spider monkeys that can be spotted in the forests of Northern Colombia and Northwestern Venezuela.

They are primates that prefer undisturbed dense forests, and stay most of the time high in trees. Instead of walking or running on all fours, these monkeys travel mostly by swinging and climbing.

However, it is not for their strange eating habits that the brown spider monkeys are in the news, but for the threat of extinction they face. This species was among the world's 25 most endangered primates as of 2004 and 2006, and has been classified as critically endangered, by the IUCN Red List.



Hunting and habitat destruction due to human encroach-

ment, conversion of forests into agricultural lands etc. are the main factors that threaten them. Its slow reproductive rate also makes the situation worse.

Serrania de San Lucas in southern Bolivar is one of the places where the monkeys are protected. There are also various zoos, especially in Europe, that provide them safe shelters.

Andean Mountain Cat

Why is the Andean mountain cat special?

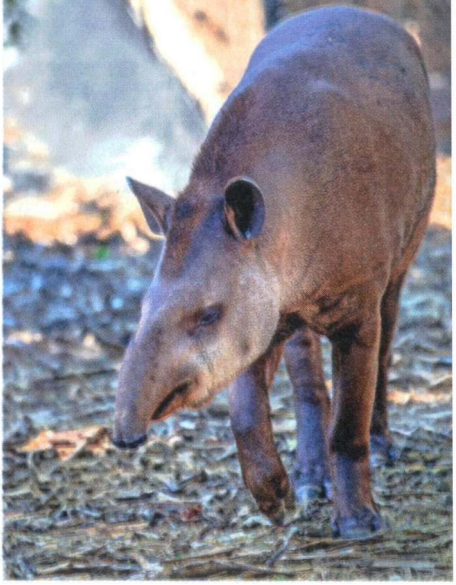
The Andean cat is considered to be one of the cutest, and the most endangered wild cats in the world. It is a small feline with long soft fur, a thick tale and pale silvery gray colour.

Andean mountain cats are found in the areas of the Andes mountains of Chile, Argentina, Bolivia and Peru. The cat is believed to be a solitary animal. Its population is estimated to be less than 2500, and hence, is classified as endangered by the IUCN.

The main reasons for the danger these cats face is habitat loss, cattle grazing, and hunting. It is said that many Andean cats have been killed by local people who believe that the cats are predators of their domestic animals. They are also killed by local shepherds or their dogs, and hunted for food and traditional medicine in places in Peru. Besides, the reduction of its prey is also a factor for the decline of this cat population.

What are the reasons behind the decline in the population of the Baird's tapir?

As strange as their name, tapirs are animals that look like pigs with a trunk, but they are in fact, related to horses and rhinoceros. Baird's tapir is a Latin American species of tapir that is seen in Mexico, Central America, and North-western South America.



Baird's Tapir

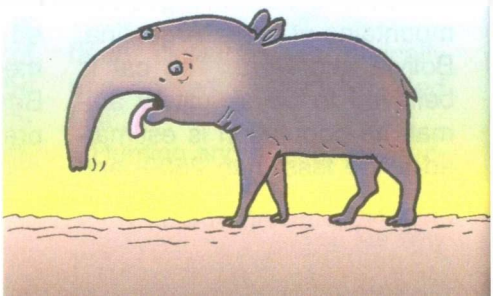
CURIOUS FACT

In the Name of Tapir!

The Baird's tapir is a tapir species seen in the Central America. It is named after the American naturalist Spencer Fullerton Baird, who travelled all the way to Mexico in 1843, to observe these animals.

Not many researches have been conducted on the lives of Baird's tapirs. But experts say that the animals are shy and solitary, and live in forests, close to areas that have a permanent water supply.

With less than 5500 individuals left in the wild, Baird's tapirs are classified as endangered animals by the IUCN.



What makes the Mexican prairie dog an endangered animal?

As the name suggests, Mexican prairie dogs are a species of prairie dogs found in Mexico. They mostly inhabit flat prairies, and valleys between mountains, at a height of 1600 to 2200 metres.

Thought to be highly social rodents, Mexican prairie dogs belong to the same family as squirrels. They live in extensive burrow networks known as towns. Depending on the habitat, each town may have up to a hundred individuals! This species is active during the day throughout the year, and feeds on just grasses.

Mexican Prairie Dogs

However, one cannot see many of these individuals together anymore, as Mexican prairie dogs have become an endangered species. Habitat loss is the main reason for the decline in the number of Mexican prairie dogs. It is also hunted for food, and poisoned by locals, since the dogs are believed to destroy farms.

Language-lovers

The Mexican prairie dogs have a vocabulary that is far more advanced than that of any other animal language. But to a human ear, their squeaky calls can sound only simple and repetitive.

Asian Elephants

Why are Asian elephants under threat?

Asian elephants are those distributed throughout Southeast Asia, from India to Borneo. With its immense size and strength, this largest living animal has played an important role in our economies, religions and culture.

By nature, Asian elephants are extremely sociable animals that form groups of six to seven individuals. Most of their time is spent feeding on grass-

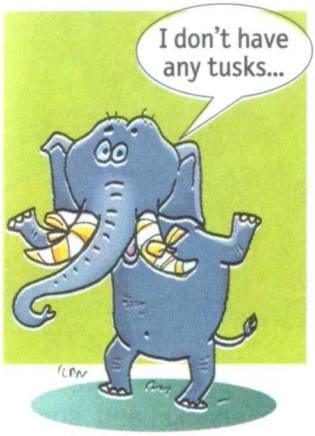
Why is the Amur leopard an animal to conserve for future?

Amur leopards are known by different names across the world- as Manchurian leopards, Far Eastern leopards, or Korean leopards. They are a critically endangered subspecies that are just less than 70 in number.

This attractive wild animal is native to the Primorye region of southeastern Russia, and the Jilin province of northeast China. Like other leopards, they too run at a speed of up to 60 kilometres per hour.

In general, amur leopards are very strong and solitary beings. However, they are on the verge of being extinct. In spite of having some tracts of suitable habitats in Russia and China, encroachments, new roads and developmental activities into the wild have badly affected their population.

However, the main reason for the fall in number of amur



es, but they also eat tree bark, roots, leaves, and small stems besides cultivated crops like bananas and sugar cane. They prefer staying close to sources of fresh water.

Although suitable habitats exist for this species, Asian elephants are still endangered. In India, the biggest threat is habitat loss.

In general, these elephants face the great risk of poaching too. Their tusks are the main reason why they are hunted. They are captured alive to be used as tourist attractions or sometimes, to be used in circuses and other inhumane entertainments. Different countries have taken different legal measures to protect their elephant species. Trading in ivory and elephant hunting is illegal in most countries.

STAR FACT

Snow Life

Amur leopards are the only leopards that can live and hunt in snow.

Amur Leopard

leopards is massive poaching. They are hunted mostly for their beautiful skin. Reports show that in many instances, the locals living around the habitats have killed these leopards for skin.

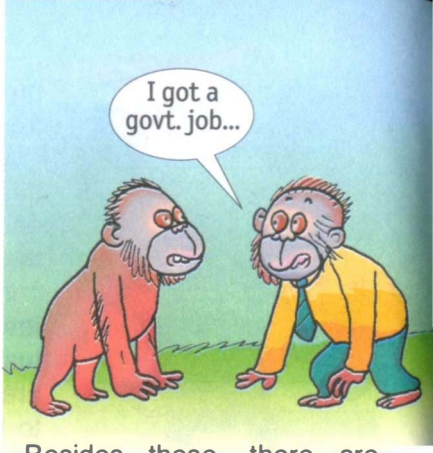
Why are Bornean orang-utans special?

Bornean orang-utans are a species of orang-utans that are seen on the island of Borneo. Sharing more than 90 per cent of their DNA with humans, orang-utans are highly intelligent and skilled animals. They are small sized apes that eat over 500 plant species for their diet.

Experts hold that orang-utans are important for the major role they play in seed dispersal. This helps, in a large way, in keeping forests healthy.

But this species is also special, and rather precious, because of their falling numbers, According to the IUCN, the population of Bornean orang-utans has dropped by almost two-third since the 1970s.

The most important factors contributing to this includes hunting and conversion of forest land. The pet trade using young orang-utans that involves huge cash, is another threat before the species.



Besides these, there are merciless attacks and sometimes killings by local residents, when the orang-utans move into agricultural areas and feed on them.

The WWF is one of the few organisations that work with governments, and local bodies to conserve Bornean orang-utans.

Bornean Orang-utan

Jills, Hobs and Kits

Female black-footed ferrets are popularly known as 'jills', males are called 'hobs', and young ones, 'kits'.

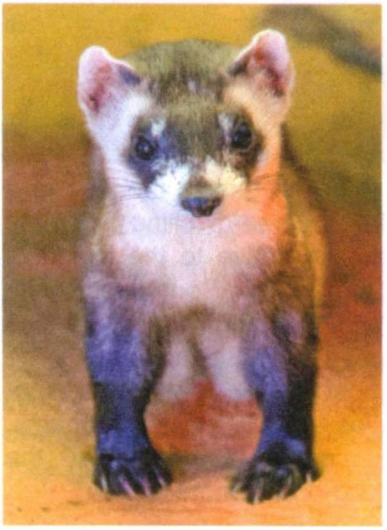
Why is the black-footed ferret endangered?

The black-footed ferret is a member of the weasel family that is native to North America. This short-legged animal with a slender body is perhaps, the rarest mammal in the country.

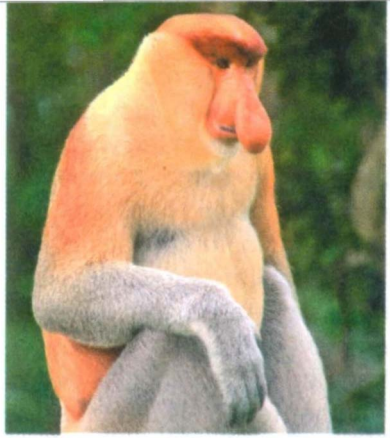
They are nocturnal animals that leave their burrows at night. Most of their time is spent underground. Prairie dogs form the major part of the diet of a black-footed ferret. It is said that the animal eats more than 100 prairie dogs in a year.

Once numbered in the tens of thousands, this ferret species had almost been extinct in the 1960s. But slowly, they made a comeback. However, black-footed ferrets are still endangered with just around 300 individuals in the wild, and almost the same number in captive breeding facilities.

The main threat facing ferrets is habitat destruction. Non-native diseases too pose an equally dangerous challenge, hampering their recovery. Another reason is the massive killing of prairie dogs. This leaves ferrets without food. Many programmes have been undertaken to protect this species from extinction.



Black-footed Ferret



Proboscis Monkey

Why is the proboscis monkey considered an endangered animal?

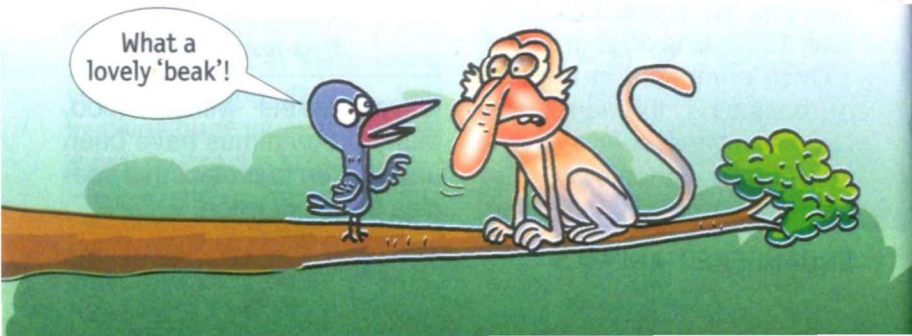
The proboscis monkey is a large tree-dwelling primate that is native to the island of Borneo in Southeast Asia. With its long and pendulous nose, this is one among the most easily identifiable species of Borneo's primates. Hence, it is also called the long-nosed monkey.

Proboscis monkeys have partially webbed feet that make them excellent swimmers.

Due to extensive habitat destruction and hunting, they have become endangered. Today, there are just less than 1000 of them remaining in the world. Conversion of forest land for agriculture, and palm-plantations pose major threats to their existence.

They are also vulnerable to poaching. They are hunted for bushmeat, as well as to make traditional Chinese medicine. Hence, the population is said to have reduced by more than 50 per cent in the past four decades.

Experts note that proboscis monkeys are highly sensitive to digestive complications, noise pollution, diseases, and human interference. They are, therefore, protected by law, throughout the Borneo range.



What makes the gharial an extremely threatened animal?

Gharials are large crocodiles found in the Indian subcontinent. They are among the largest living crocodiles in

Gharials

the world. These animals have long snouts and mouths with around 110 sharp teeth. The name of this species comes from the unique shape of their snouts. The snouts resemble earthenware pots used in India known as 'gharas', hence the name gharials.

These animals were seen in Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar other than in India. But today, it is a critically endangered species that can be spotted only in India and Nepal.

This change, experts say, has hap-

Slide Walk

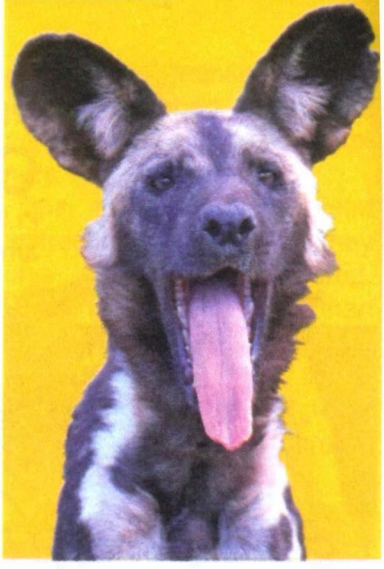
Gharials have very weak legs, unlike other crocodilians. As a result, they are unable to move properly on land. All they can do is push themselves forward, and slide on the belly.

pened over the past decades. With increase in farming and agricultural practices, many habitats of the crocodiles were encroached. Then, factors like mining, pollution and other general disturbances contributed to environmental changes.

History points out that the species came close to extinction by the 1970s, but was saved by a long-term captive breeding and re-introduction programme. However, in the late 1990s the population again declined. The National Chambal Sanctuary and Katarniaghat Sanctuary are two of the places in the country where gharials are protected.

Why is the African wild dog seen rarely?

African wild dogs are members of the dog family that are seen in southern Africa and the southern part of East Africa, especially Tanzania, and Northern Mozambique. They mostly roam in savannah, open plains, and sometimes, in the woodlands of these countries.



African Wild Dog

Once respected by several hunter-gatherer societies, African wild dogs are known by various different names like painted dogs, cape hunting

dogs, and African hunting dogs. They are highly social, and live in packs of around 10 individuals.

However, the dogs are most talked about for their reducing numbers. They are considered to be the most endangered predators of Africa. The major threats to their existence are killing, both accidental and targeted, as well as diseases like rabies, canine distemper etc.

As human encroachment increases, the habitats of the wild dogs are destroyed. This is another factor that leads to Man-animal conflict.

tively small sizes, baby-faces, large ears, and plump bellies. The size of these elephants is a fifth smaller than the mainland Indian elephants.

The tails of Bornean elephants are so long that they often drag it on the ground as they move.

Borneo Elephant

Why is the Borneo elephant different?

Believed to be the cutest in the world, Borneo elephants are a subspecies of Asian elephants native to the lowland forests of Indonesia and Malaysia. They are also known as pygmy elephants, with relatively small sizes, baby-faces, large ears, and plump bellies. The size of these elephants is a fifth smaller than the mainland Indian elephants.

With a population less than 2000 altogether, they have been classified as endangered by the IUCN Red List. Due to massive deforestation, the habitats of these elephants in Bornea are fragmented. This leaves the animals without shelter and food. Conversion of forest land to commercial

plantations, logging, expansion of agriculture fields, and palm plantations too have affected the lives of Bornean elephants very badly.

They are also hunted down for their valuable tusks. Reports reveal that snares or poisons are often used in forests to catch the elephants. However, this endangered species is protected by law in Malaysia.

Chinese Alligator

Why is the Chinese alligator considered as an endangered animal?

As their name suggests, Chinese alligators are members of the alligator family native to China. Originally, their range extended through much of the country. But today, they can be spotted in swamps and ponds in the lower basin of the Yangtze River alone. The population of these alligators have been reduced due to exploitation of their habitat and poisoning of prey.

The skin of Chinese alligators were once used to make drums but it was never a popular material for making leather products. Besides, these alligators do not attack humans. Yet, we treat them so badly that they are on the verge of

AMAZING

Not Roar, but Purr!

Cheetahs cannot roar like other big cats, they can only purr like domestic cats.

extinction. In 1998, the largest area where alligators lived was a small pond along the Yangtze River, surrounded by farmland. And the number of individuals in them was 11!

Poaching is another threat. These animals are hunted for their meat, which is used in traditional Chinese medicine. Apart from all these, they are killed simply because people think of them as a menace. Experts warn that unless extreme actions are taken, this subspecies will soon become extinct in the wild.

Asiatic Cheetah

Why is the Asiatic cheetah a rare sight?

An Asiatic cheetah is one of the rarest animals today, because of its status of being critically endangered.

One of the fastest mammals alive, this animal was once prevalent on the Indian subcontinent. Its range extended throughout India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. But today, if one has to be lucky enough to see an Asiatic cheetah, he has to go to remote areas in Eastern Iran. Hence, the animal is now also known as the Iranian cheetah. Studies show that presently there are only less than 50 cheetahs in the wild.

One of the reasons for the disappearance of Asiatic cheetahs is

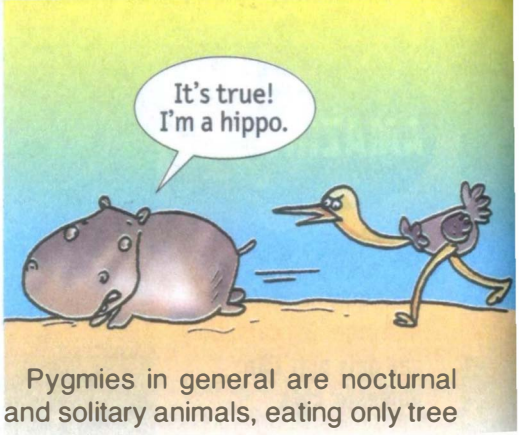
thought to be the absence of preferred preys. We know for a fact that when small animals in an area are overhunted, it affects the larger ones too.

Apart from this, cheetahs are poached in large numbers. In Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, it was hunting that brought the cheetah population to a close.

Why is the pygmy hippopotamus endangered?

Pygmy hippopotamuses, as appropriately named, are a small-sized relatives of common hippopotamuses. They are native to the swamps of West Africa, mainly Liberia.

Compared to their cousins, a pygmy hippo is tiny in size. It reaches just up to 80 cms in height, and its weight is less than one-fourth of that of a full-sized hippo.



Pygmies in general are nocturnal and solitary animals, eating only tree leaves, branches, fallen leaves, and fruits. With just less than 3000 individuals, they are classified as an endangered species by the IUCN Red List.

The main reasons for their population decline can be predicted- habitat loss, conversion to farm land and hunting for food. In spite of the prohi-

Pygmy Hippopotamus

bition of the bushmeat trade and, several awareness programs about the need to conserve endangered species, hunting of pygmy hippos is still a reality in Liberia.

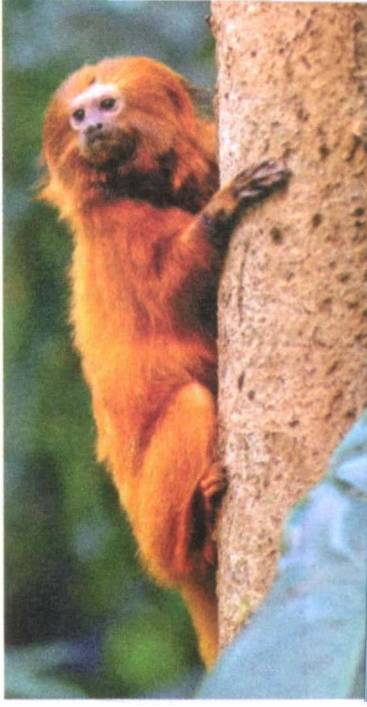
Why is the golden lion tamarin special?

The golden lion tamarin, or golden marmoset is one of the rarest animals in the world, native to the Atlantic coastal forests of Brazil. It is a peculiar, tree-dwelling monkey with a small rounded head that is surrounded by a thick, golden mane. Its body and tail are covered with long silky hair that comes in pale blonde to reddish golden colour.

After observing a shrinking population, the IUCN Red List classified the golden lion tamarin as an endangered species. Subsequently, a few wildlife organisations started reintroduction programmes from 140 zoos worldwide.

Although it was a success, the population of the monkeys is still not out of danger. Due to logging, agriculture and industry-expansion, the rain forests of Brazil are disappearing.

That means that the habitats of the golden lion tamarins are being destroyed. Yet another challenge the species face is the illegal pet trade. With all these, the estimated wild population of this golden animal is thought to be less than 3500.



Golden Lion Tamarin

Why is it said that chinchillas are endangered animals?

As adorable as their name, chinchillas are rodents seen in the Andes Mountains of

Northern Chile. These beautiful creatures are best known for their soft, velvet-like fur.

But sadly, the same feature has taken them close to extinction. They are one of the most critically endangered species on Earth, as classified by the IUCN Red List.

The population of wild chinchillas has been in danger for at least a hundred years. Previously, they were found extensively in the coastal regions, hills and mountains of Chile, Peru, Argentina, and Bolivia.

Chinchilla

But poaching, hunting, habitat destruction, deforestation etc have strictly confined the animals to the very few regions where they are now seen.

In 1920, legal measures were framed by the countries to protect the species. However, they still don't help as required. Poaching for fur has been the greatest threat before chinchillas.

Long Life

Golden lion tamarins that survive the first year of birth, usually live till the age of eight. The one that lived the longest made it to 31!

Carrier of Evil!

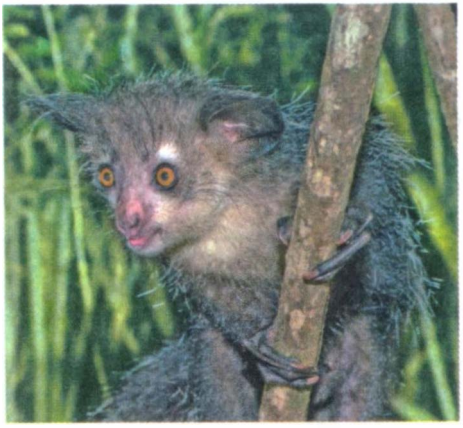
An aye-aye is thought to be a harbinger of evil by some of the Malagasy people. They often kill the creature on sight and hang it up so that the evil spirit is carried away by a random traveller!

Why is the aye-aye special?

An aye-aye may not sound like a living thing, but it is in reality, a lemur that is native to Madagascar. The appearance of this creature is as strange as its name. At first glance, it seems to be a rodent, but in fact, it is a primate.

The name aye-aye, was given by French naturalist Pierre Sonnerat in 1782, while describing the lemur. This primate comes in dark brown or black colour, and has a bushy tail that is larger than their body.

The species was thought to be extinct in 1933. In 1957, they were rediscovered. Currently, aye-ayes are the largest, and the most endangered nocturnal primates classified by the IUCN Red List.



Aye-aye

There are many reasons for the fall in their numbers. One of them is superstition. There is a belief in Madagascar that an aye-aye brings bad luck. For this reason, many of these animals are mercilessly killed on sight. Then of course, they are hunted down, and their habitats destroyed to meet man's selfish needs.

Red Wolf

Why is the red wolf considered an endangered animal?

The red wolf, or the Florida wolf, is one of the two species of wolves native to the Eastern United States. The other one is the gray wolf. The name red wolf comes from the reddish colour of the animal's fur. Otherwise, these wolves are mostly brown and buff coloured. They are highly social animals living in packs, known to avoid humans and human activities. Raccoons, rabbits, white-tailed deer, nutria,

Shell to Sell

Since Ancient Egyptian times, hawksbill sea turtles have been harvested for their beautiful shells. The curio tortoiseshell is normally taken from these aquatic animals.

Why is the hawksbill sea turtle a rare sight?

A hawksbill sea turtle is one of the most critically endangered species found in the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Generally, these aquatic beings spend most of their time in shallow lagoons and coral reefs, feeding on sponges, sea anemones and jellyfishes.

The appearance of a hawksbill turtle is similar to that of other marine turtles. They have narrow, pointed beaks and distinctive patterns of overlapping scales on their shells. It

and other rodents form their main diet.

Red wolves are in the news often because of their decreasing number. It is one of the critically endangered species in the world, as classified by the IUCN Red List in 1996.

Red wolves started disappearing by the 1990s. The belief that red wolves cause cattle loss is widespread, and this has resulted in indiscriminate killing of these animals in remote areas. Land clearing, hunting, logging, road development, mineral exploration,

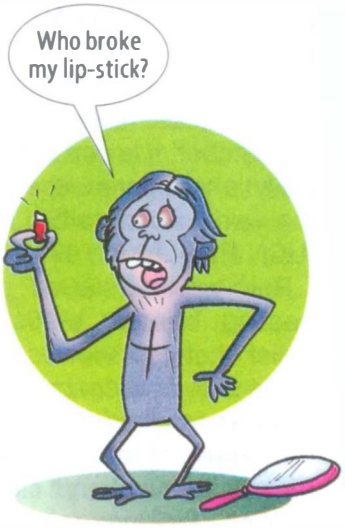
etc., too have affected this helpless species.

The current wild population of red wolves is at its worst ever- there are less than 100 left.

is said that depending on the temperature of the water, the shells of these turtles change colour, making them a highly valuable species.

A hawksbill sea turtle is now a rare animal, merely because of human activities. They are widely hunted for meat, as well as for other purposes. In many parts of the world, they are still seen as delicacies. Another

reason for their exploitation is the attractive shells of hawksbill turtles, which have largely become materials for decoration and jewellery-making. The existence of these turtles is also threatened by heavy pollution in water and loss of nesting areas due to coastal development.



Why is the bonobo special?

The name bonobo many sound really cute to many of us, but the lives of these animals are anything but cute. A bonobo is an endangered animal that can be seen only in the jungles of the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Africa.

They are also known by the names pygmy chimpanzees and gracile chimpanzees. The animal is distinguished by its long legs, dark face, pink lips, and parted long hair. In general, they are known to be peaceful primates, living in groups led by females.

Along with common chimpanzees, bonobos are also very close relatives of human beings,

Bonobo

and are of high intelligence.

Although there isn't much data, the remaining population of bonobos is thought to be something between 29,500 and 50,000. Hence, they are classified as endangered by the IUCN Red List.

By now, you must be aware that almost all the species that are endangered, consider humans as their biggest threat. It's not different in the case of bonobos either.

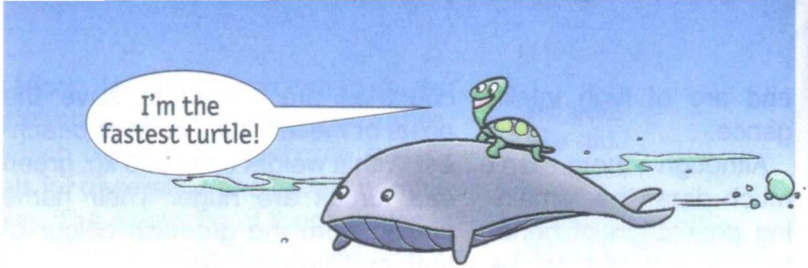
Why is the green sea turtle considered as an endangered species?

Green sea turtles are large sea turtles that can be spotted in tropical and subtropical seas around the world. The distinct populations of these sea animals are seen predominantly in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and sometimes, in the Indian Ocean too. Over 80 countries are known to have the nests of these turtles on their beaches. With a weight up to 300 kg, green sea turtles are huge. Their name comes from the greenish colour of their cartilage and fat.

Like many other species, green sea turtles too have an unsafe existence. As a result, they have been listed as endangered by the IUCN Red List.

Green Sea Turtle

The reasons for the falling population of the turtles are both intentional and accidental. In general, these animals are continuously hunted for food and their eggs. Then there are other unintentional reasons like boat strikes and fishing nets that lack turtle excluder devices.



Why is the sei whale an endangered animal?

The sei whale is one of the fastest whales in the world that inhabits all oceans and adjoining areas, except those in polar and tropical regions. They are the third largest rorquals, followed by blue whales and fin whales.

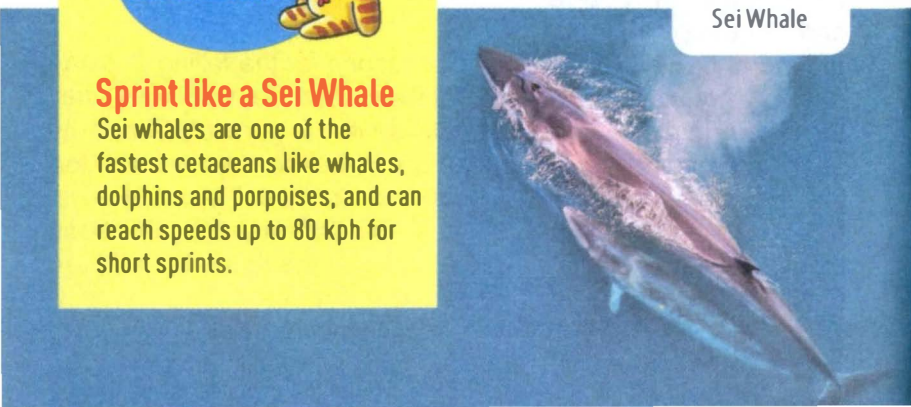
Sei whales are sometimes seen travelling alone, or in pods of up to six individuals. A normal individual is about 14 to 20 metres long, with a weight up to 26 tonnes. Females are a little longer than males. If unharmed, these animals can live till the age of 65.

As they are at the top of the food chain, whales have an important role in the overall health of a marine ecosystem. But today, they have a very insecure existence due to human activities.

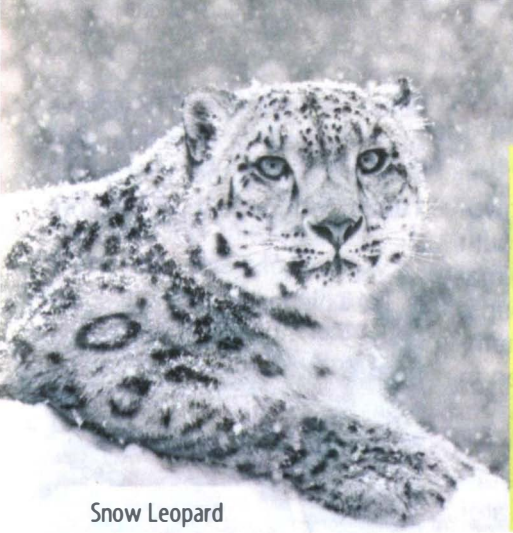
The biggest threat faced by the sei whale population is commercial whaling. Besides, there is something called scientific whaling, carried out by countries like Iceland and Japan. It means killing whales for scientific research.

Sprint like a Sei Whale

Sei whales are one of the fastest cetaceans like whales, dolphins and porpoises, and can reach speeds up to 80 kph for short sprints.



Sei Whale



Snow Leopard

STAR FACT

High Level!

Snow leopards are known to climb up to a height of 5000 metres from the sea level, in search of cooler altitudes, during summer.

There have also been events of mass deaths of sei whales in the past due to pollution, and the presence of toxic substances in water.

What makes the snow leopard an endangered animal?

A snow leopard is a large cat that is native to the mountain areas of Central and South Asia. These wild cats can be spotted sporadically in the alpine and subalpine zones of China, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia, and Mongolia, at heights between 3000 to 4500m.

In size, snow leopards are slightly smaller than others of its family. They have stocky bodies with thick fur and small, rounded ears, all of which together, help the animal to minimize heat loss.

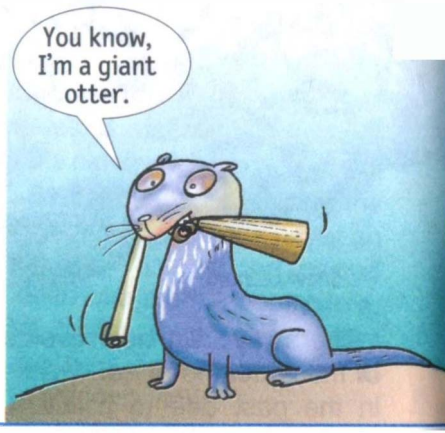
Although the animals are agile and powerfully built, their population is in great danger. The main reasons for such falling numbers are hunting, habitat loss, and retaliatory killings. With the reduction in the number of its prey like the Argali sheep, ibex, and hares, these leopards are forced to hunt domestic animals in its nearby areas.

As a result, locals kill them in retaliation. The leopards are also poached for their skin for making fur coats.

What makes the giant otter rare?

The giant otter, is a carnivorous mammal native to South America. It is a social animal that lives with family groups, supporting up to eight members. They are mostly seen in freshwater rivers and streams that are seasonally flooded. Sometimes, these animals are also spotted in freshwater lakes and springs.

The primary cause of the decline of the giant otter population is poaching. They have been hunted for decades, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s, bringing their number



Why is the Grevy's zebra considered an endangered animal?

The Grevy's zebra is an important member of the horse family. Also known as the imperial zebra, they are the most endangered of the zebra species. Historically, they were seen in the semi-arid scrublands and plains of Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Kenya in East Africa. But now, their range is confined to a few parts of Southern Ethiopia, and Northern Kenya.

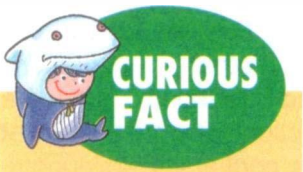
Grevy's Zebra

to less than 5000. It is the velvety pelt that makes a giant otter an attractive target. Besides, the animals are extremely easy to hunt as they are active throughout the day. And by nature, otters are inquisitive and fearless towards human beings. This make it even worse for them.

Other factors are habitat loss and degradation caused by mining, logging, and over-fishing. Quite a lot of giant otters are killed by fishermen who consider them to be a menace.

Giant Otter

Compared to its relatives, Grevy's zebras have larger ears and narrower stripes. They feed mostly on grass, roots, and tree bark, and also on hard seeds. It is believed that these zebras can live without water for about three days.



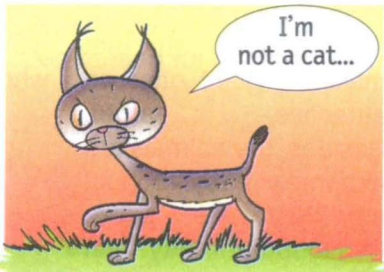
Newborn 'Hope'

Newborn Grevy's zebra foals can stand up just six minutes after their birth, and start running in 45 minutes!

During the 1970s, the population of Grevy's zebras was thought to be 15,000. But at the start of the 21st century, this number came down to 3500.

Today, there are estimated to be around 2500 in the wild. In captivity, there are around 600 individuals surviving. The main reason for the fall in population is poaching. The skin of these zebras is of great value in the global market.

What makes the Iberian lynx special?



Iberian lynx is a wild cat native to the Iberian Peninsula. It is one of the most endangered animals on Earth, as classified by the IUCN Red List. Lynxes were once seen throughout the Iberian Peninsula, and the South of France. But since the mid 1990s, only fragmented populations have survived, that too in Central and south-western parts of Spain, and in a few areas of Portugal.

Iberian Lynx

This wild animal is distinguished with a bobbed tail, spotted coat, muscular body and long legs. By nature, they are solitary and nocturnal. European rabbits alone form the diet for an Iberian lynx. In the 20th century, there was a sharp fall in the number of these rabbits. This in turn, caused a decline in the population of lynx too. Besides, there are other human-induced reasons like the destruction of forest habitat and its conversion to agricultural land, hunting, accidental killings, construction of dams, highways and railways.

By the start of the 21st century, the number of Iberian lynx came down to around 100, and the animal was on the verge of extinction.

Short Relatives

It has been found that giraffes are related to deer and okapis. History reveals that although they differ in appearance, giraffes were once shaped more like deer!

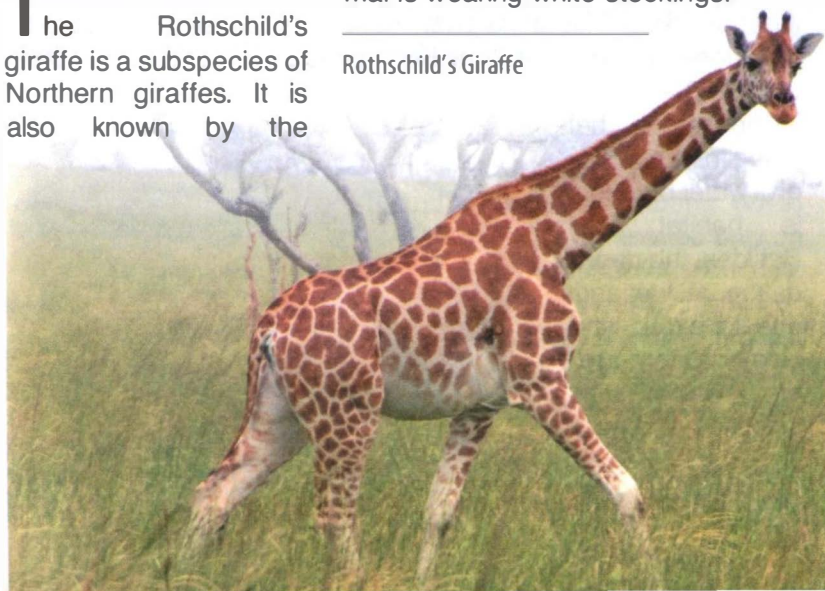
Why is the Rothschild's giraffe considered an endangered animal?

The Rothschild's giraffe is a subspecies of Northern giraffes. It is also known by the names Baringo giraffe and Ugandan giraffe.

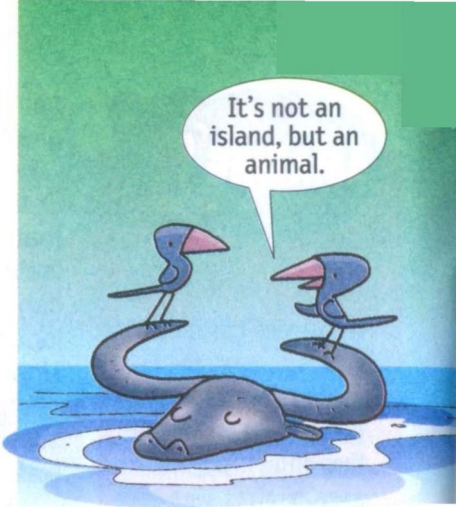
With just around 1500 individuals in the wild, it is yet another animal that has an endangered existence. Isolated population of this animal can be seen in savannah, grasslands, and the open woodlands of Uganda and Kenya. The strange name of these animals come from zoologist Walter Rothschild, who was the first to describe the species.

What makes a Rothschild's giraffe different from others in the family is its appearance. It has a specific type of coat pattern, with light brown patches and creamy lines in between. Also, it has no markings below the knees, making one feel that the animal is wearing white stockings!

Rothschild's Giraffe



The biggest threats to the lives of Rothschild's giraffes are poaching, expansion of human population and habitat loss.



Why is the wild water buffalo rare?

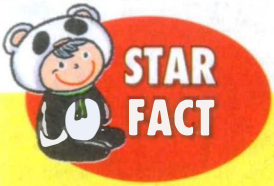
The wild water buffalo is a large bovine native to South-east Asia, particularly India. They are seen mostly in wet grasslands, swamps, and river valleys in India, Bhutan, Nepal, Thailand and Cambodia. With a wild population of less than 4000 individuals, these animals are now a rare sight.

In general, wild water buffaloes are larger and heavier than domestic ones, and weigh up to 1200 kg.

The major challenge for the survival of water buffaloes is habitat loss. Besides, the degradation of wetlands due to exotic species like stem twiners and linas, diseases and parasites transmitted from domestic livestock etc. have contributed largely to the decline of the water buffalo population.

In countries like Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar these animals are hunted on a large scale. This happens despite the fact that hunting and killing

Wild Water Buffalo



Colonel Przhewalsky

Once it was thought that the Przewalski's horse was a species discovered by the Russian explorer Colonel Nikolay Przhevalsky. This was later proved wrong. However, the name of the horse remained the same.

of these endangered animals are prohibited in many countries including Thailand, Nepal, Bhutan and India.

Why is the Przewalski's horse considered as an endangered animal?

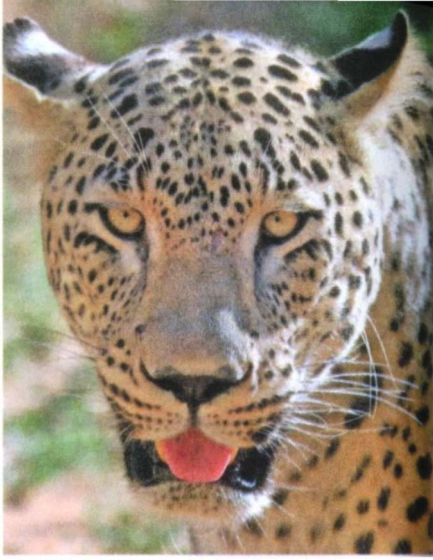
The Przewalski's horse is quite a strange name for an animal, isn't? Not many of us have heard of the animal, mainly because not many exist today. Also known as the Dzungarian horse, these are a rare and endangered subspecies of wild horses, native to the steppes of Central Asia.

It is a relatively small member of the horse family, with a stiff, dark, upright mane and a height up to 1.4 metres. They were once found throughout Mongolia, Northern China, and some parts of Siberia. But at present, they can be spotted only on the plains and prairies of Mongolia. There is no evidence to show that the animal was ever domesticated, and so one can say a Przewalski's horse is the only wild horse in the world today.

Przewalski's Horse

In the 1960s, the species was almost extinct in the wild, but was

saved after a few individuals were reintroduced to their native habitats at the Khustain Nuruu National Park, Takhin Tal Nature Reserve, and Khomiin Tal in Mongolia. The main reasons for the disappearance were hunting for meat, and interbreeding with domesticated horses. Today, there are many zoos in the world where these horses are seen in small numbers.



Persian Leopard

Why is the Persian leopard special?

The Persian leopard is one of the largest recognized subspecies of leopard. Also called a Caucasian leopard, or a Central Asian leopard, it is seen predominantly in Iran, and sporadically across countries like Armenia, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. These wild cats are known to live in mountainous habitats, including in dry environments, lush forests and snowy ranges.

Typically, Persian leopards have short legs, and a very powerful frame. Coats that appear from yellow to golden brown colours with a paler fur, and the black spots seen across the body together, make the animal royally attractive.

Although there is a relatively large geographic range for them, the population of Per-

sian leopards is disappointing. There are estimated to be less than 900 individuals in the wild. Subsequently, they have been classified as endangered by the IUCN Red List. There are several reasons known to have contributed to the fall. Poaching for fur trade and loss of habitat due to deforestation, are the obvious ones.

Why is the Malayan tapir endangered?

The Malayan tapir is the largest of the tapirs native to Asia. In fact, they are the only members of this family seen in the continent, though in very small numbers. The rainforests in the Malayan Peninsula, Myanmar, Thailand and the Indonesian island of Sumatra are the places where tapirs can now be spotted.

The number of animals surviving in the wild is unknown, but some surveys show that there aren't any more than 2500 individuals.

The appearance of tapirs are quite confusing. Though they look similar to pigs and elephants, tapirs are in fact related to horses and rhinos. Malayan tapirs are herbivores feeding on grass and nuts, water plants, and fruits.

Generally, these are solitary animals with poor eyesight and a strong sense of smell. They are also excellent swimmers and divers.

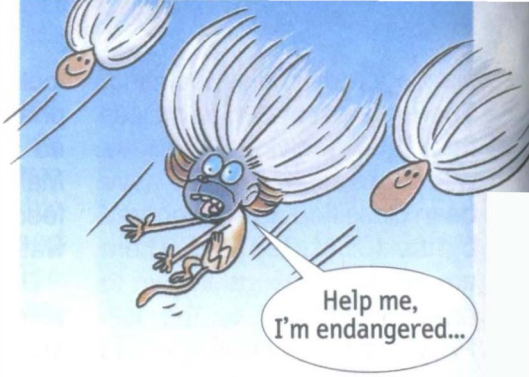
Malayan Tapir

As we saw, tapirs need dense forests to survive. Hence, the primary reason for the decline in their population is loss of habitat, caused by deforestation. They are also known to be poached for meat and sport.

Why is the cottontop tamarin a rare sight?

Cottontop tamarins are small species of primates native to the forests of South America. Presently, the population of these animals is at a dangerous level. Surveys indicate that there are just less than 6000 individuals in the world, making them a critically endangered species. Out of these, only 6000 tamarins can be found in the wild. The tropical forest edges, and secondary forests from Costa Rica to north western Columbia are the places where the remaining wild population can be spotted.

The interesting name of the tamarins comes from the elegant white fur that flows over their heads and shoulders. Typically, they are small primates with a body length of around 20 cms and tail length of 33 cms. These primates are very



social and live in troops with around 14 members. Fruits, insects and green plants make up the majority of a tamarin's diet. But they also eat rodents, reptiles, eggs and tree sap.

Cottontop Tamarin

The major threat for the survival of cottontop tamarins is deforestation. Besides, illegal pet trade and scientific research too contribute to their falling numbers.

Numbat

Why is it said that the numbat is an endangered animal?

A numbat is a rare marsupial animal that is native to parts of Australia. Also known as banded anteaters, they have long sticky tongues that help them pick up termites which they eat exclusively. Usually, these animals make shelters out of old and fallen trees that have hollow logs.

Numbats were once found across the Southern part of Australia, including Western Australia, South Australia and parts of New South Wales, Victoria and the Northern Territory. But now they are restricted to isolated areas in South-Western Australia.

The main reason for this sort of population fall is habitat loss. Their ranges have been cleared for agriculture, and destroyed by bush fires. Besides, these are slow-moving animals that can be easily caught by predators like cats, dogs and foxes.

In recent decades conservation programmes were active and several numbats were reintroduced to a few sites including Yookamurra Sanctuary in South Australia, and Scotia Sanctuary in New South Wales as part of captive breeding and translocation programmes.

CURIOUS FACT

Termite-eater

Using their sticky tongues, numbats can catch up to 20,000 termites a day!

Radiated Tortoise

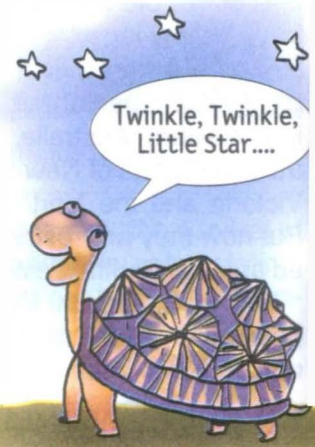
Why is the radiated tortoise an endangered animal?

A radiated tortoise is one of the most attractive species in the family, native to Southern Madagascar. Typically, these group of tortoises have bright yellow skin coloration with black markings on the head. They also have high-domed black to brown shells, covered with yellow or orange star like patterns. This is what particularly makes the animal stunning.

Radiated tortoises generally lead solitary lives, but are sometimes found grazing together.

To protect themselves from predators, the tortoises pull their soft limbs and head inside their hard shells. They also make loud screeching noises during times of crises.

Another interesting characteristic is their lifespan. Radiated tortoises live for a very long time, sometimes up to the age of 188! However their lives are often cut short by merciless humans and their activities. As a result, this species have become critically endangered. The reasons for this are poaching and destruction of habitat. The commercial trade of these aquatic beings and their pet trade are illegal.



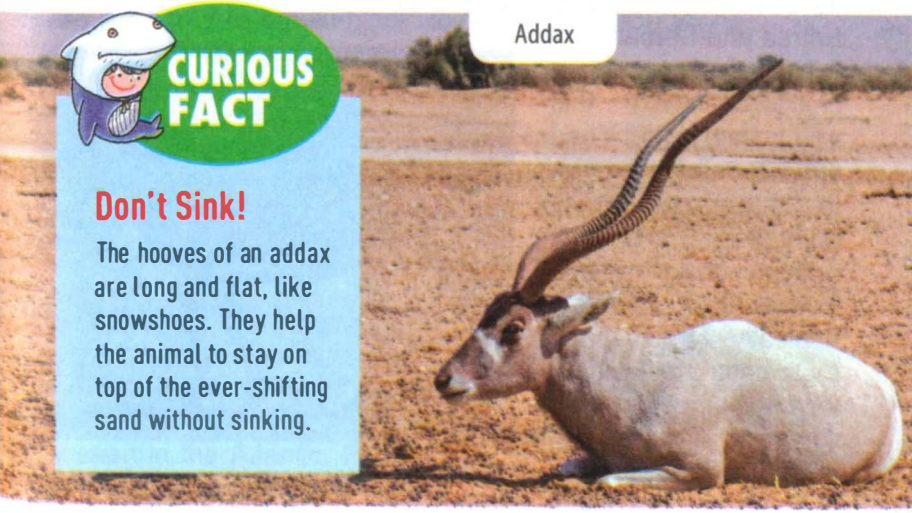
Why is the addax an important animal?

The addax is a critically endangered desert antelope found in the Sahara Desert in Africa. It is also known as a white antelope.

This animal has many interesting features and one of them is the ability to change colour of its coat, depending on the season. It could be grey or brown in winter, and sandy or white in summer. The neck and head of these animals is mainly brown.

The addax is a desert animal that can live in a very harsh climate where no other animals can survive. This also means they have no particular competition for food or water. Under such circumstances how could their population drop to levels as low as to become 'critically' endangered? Well, the only answer to this would be human activities.

The biggest threat these animals face is from people who visit their ranges in vehicles. They kill these slow-moving antelopes. It is said that when a car follows a herd of addax, they desperately try to escape, and later run out of energy, only to get killed.

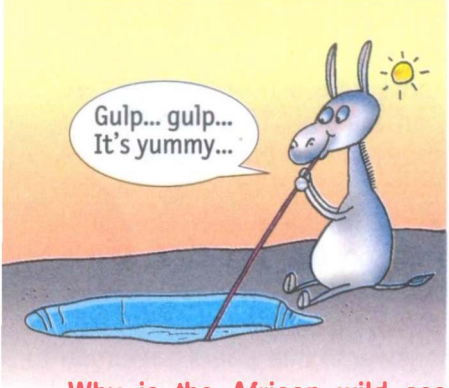


Addax

CURIOUS FACT

Don't Sink!

The hooves of an addax are long and flat, like snowshoes. They help the animal to stay on top of the ever-shifting sand without sinking.



Why is the African wild ass rare?

By scientific classification, the African wild ass is a member of the horse family. But it can be best defined as an ancestor of domestic donkeys. These are animals that live in the deserts, and other arid areas of Africa, mainly Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia.

The most important characteristic of this wild animal is that it can survive water loss of up to 30 per cent of its body weight, and drink enough water to replace it in under 5 minutes! Typically, these animals have stocky bodies with smooth coats in light grey to fawn colours. Wild asses can eat hard and dry plants too. However, in spite of their ability to survive tough conditions, these animals are reducing in their number. They have been classified as critically endangered. The main reasons for this situation are interbreeding, poaching, hunting and competition for food.

Another reason is poaching for food and traditional medicine, which is quite common in African countries. Then, there is the competition with domestic livestock for grazing, as well as water. This is caused by agricultural development, which poses further threats to the survival of this wild asses.

African Wild Ass

Fin Whale

Why is the declining fin whale population a great cause of concern?

Fin whales are the second largest mammals in the world, after blue whales. They are also among the fastest of rorquals that can reach up to 37 kilometres in an hour. Hence, a fin whale is also called the greyhound of the sea.

In physical appearance, fin whales are light grey to brown-black colour on the upper surface, and white on the lower.

Another important feature is their dorsal fin which can be as long as 60 cms in length. It is said that these mammals that grow up to 26 metres in length, and 114 tonnes in weight can dive to depths of 230 metres! Typically, females in this species are larger than their male counterparts.

Fin whales are known to have a global distribution but they are mainly seen in the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, and Arctic Oceans. However, due to their slim population, these whales are classified as endangered. The major threat before the species is hunting.

Besides that chemical pollution too largely contribute to the decline of their population.

CURIOUS FACT

Whale Killers

Killer whales are the main predators of fin whales, mostly attacking the young and aged ones.

Blue Whale

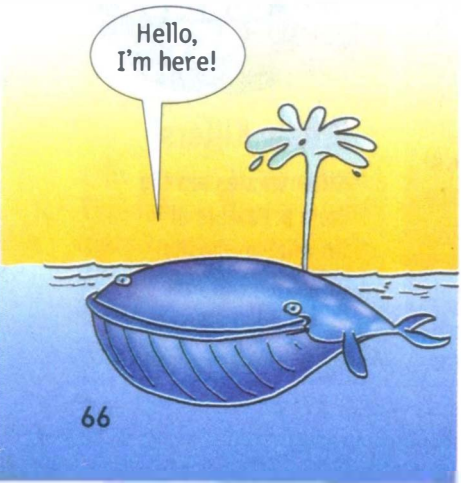
Why is a blue whale special?

Blue whales, as most of us know, are the largest animals that ever existed on Earth. They are incredibly huge and weigh as much as 150,000 kg, which is almost equivalent to the weight of 30 elephants! .

Blue whales are known to be found worldwide. Larger individuals grow up to 33.5 metres in length. Typically, they have long bodies with mottled gray colour patterns that appear to be light blue when seen through water. Krills, a kind of small crustacean, form the major diet of blue whales. These marine animals can eat about four tonnes of krills every day.

There are numerous other interesting facts about blue whales, but the saddest one is that they are endangered. The animals were almost extinct at a point, when the International Whaling Commission declared them a protected species in 1966.

The main threat then was commercial whaling, but today, it is climatic changes. The changes in marine environment have badly affected krills, and this in turn, has led to a fall in the blue whale population too. The presence of toxic substances in waters is another factor contributing to this.



What makes a saiga antelope an endangered animal?

The saiga antelope is a striking variety of antelope that originally inhabited large stretches of the steppes in Central Asia.

They are animals that have evolved to survive in extreme temperatures. Physically, the antelopes have a distinctive appearance, with an enlarged nose that hangs down over the mouth. In summer, their coats are said to become cinnamon-buff in colour, but turn white, and become very thick in winters. Mature antelopes usually have vertical horns that are ringed in the bottom.

At present, these uncommon animals can be spotted only in a few areas in Kazakhstan and Russia. They have become extinct in China and Mongolia. Due to their shrinking population, saiga antelopes were declared as critically endangered by the IUCN Red List.

Habitat degradation, poaching, and human interference are some of the main threats the animals face.

Besides, droughts, severe winters, predators and diseases too have worsened their fight for survival. Although measures were taken immediately, this is still a concern among conservationists.

Saiga Antelopes

Why is the North Atlantic right whale considered to be endangered?

The North Atlantic right whale is one of the most endangered whales in the world. It is a huge marine ani-

mal that grows up to 16 metres in length and 70 tonnes in weight. It is known to be an easy target for fishermen and hunters, as it swims close to shores, and floats when dead. Hence, its name right whale.

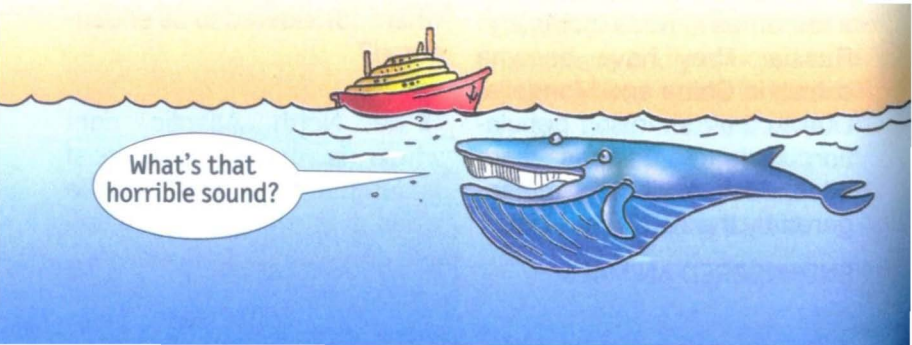
North Atlantic Right Whales

Generally, these mammals are spotted along the Atlantic coast of North America. Compared to others in the whale family, right whales are slow swimmers. They are also known to be very playful and curious animals, often poking and bumping objects they find in water.

However, the population of this species today, is just around 450! The biggest challenges for their survival are ship collisions, and entanglement in fishing nets. Besides, they have a history of being over-exploited by whalers for fat and bones. Another important factor contributing to their decline, is climatic change.

A study conducted in 2012 suggests that underwater noise created by ships could obstruct the ability of whales to communicate. This in turn, affects them while hunting food, and escaping predators.

The International Whaling Commission is an important body that regulates whaling and addresses other issues faced by this species.



Super Smart!

Mountain gorillas are intelligent enough to use tools for problem solving. For example, they often use tree branch as a bridge to cross patches of muddy ground. Smart, aren't they?

Why are mountain gorillas rare?

Mountain gorillas are large apes that live mainly in the national parks across the Virunga Mountains in Rwanda, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. With a population of around 800, they are a critically endangered species.

By nature, mountain gorillas are shy, but strong. They can be very aggressive if provoked. Beating their chests, they let out angry roars, and attack their opponents. Mother gorillas may even fight till death to protect their young ones.

Mountain gorillas are under the threat of extinction. Their main enemies are humans, who hunt them, and destroy their habitats. What worsens the situation is the civil unrest in their native countries. This results in a flow of rebels into forests, who often disturb the lives of animals.

Mountain Gorilla with its baby

Another reason for the population decline of mountain gorillas is diseases. They are very vulnerable to diseases transmitted from humans, including common cold.

Why is the Nilgiri tahr endangered?

Nilgiri tahrs are stocky goats found on the Nilgiri Hills and the southern portion of the Western Ghats across the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. It is also the state animal of Tamil Nadu. The other name of this wild goat is Nilgiri ibex.

Generally, the goats are either dark brown or grey in colour. A fully grown male is about a metre tall, and weighs around 100 kg. But females are smaller in size. Both have short and coarse coats, as well as horns that curve backwards. As for their habitats-tahrs prefer cliffs and grass-covered plateaus high up in the mountains.

Nilgiri Tahr

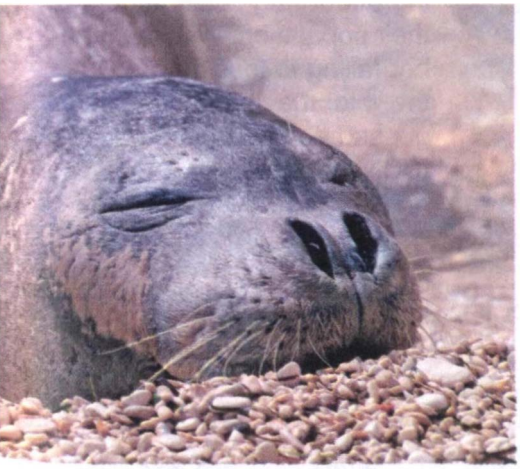
Due to the decreasing number in their population, Nilgiri tahrs are listed as endangered by the IUCN Red List. There are just between 2000 and 2500 individuals alive today, with the biggest population spotted within the Eravikulam National Park, Munnar.

Efforts for conserving the species have been taking place for the past few decades.

Why is the Mediterranean monk seal so rare?

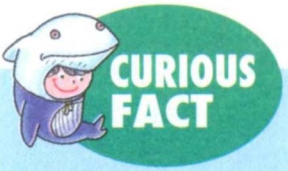
The Mediterranean monk seal is the rarest pinniped species in the world. It is endemic to the Mediterranean Sea, and the East Atlantic Ocean, along the coast of Northwest Africa.

Monk seals are known to have been first described by Greek philosopher and scientist Aristotle in the 3rd century BC. For the ancient Greeks, they were sacred animals. However, modern man has torn apart the tradition, leaving the species with very little chances of survival. According to the IUCN Red List, Mediterranean monk seals are endangered animals, with less than 700 individuals.



Mediterranean Monk Seal

The main reasons for the dropping population of the monk seals are intentional killings for their fat, oil and skin and accidental killings during fishing activities. Like all other coastal species, seals too are threatened by the destruction of coastal ecosystems, particularly because they rest and nurse their young ones on the shores.



I'm Shy!

Researchers maintain that Mediterranean sea monks are very shy, and keep themselves away from humans.

● *Devnath*

What are the specialties of the ring-tailed lemur?

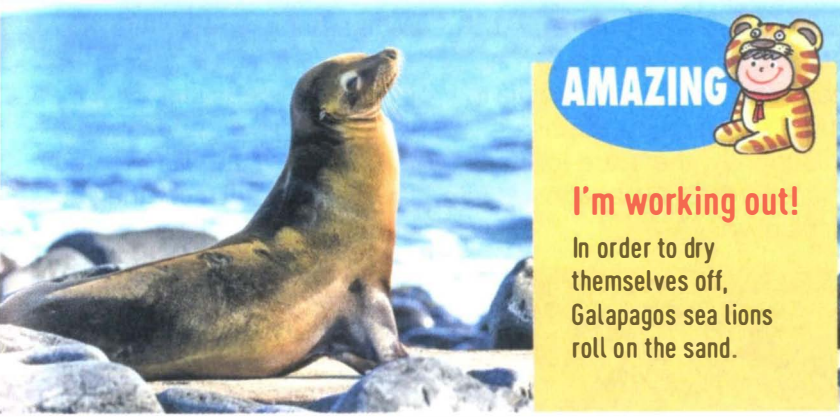
The ring-tailed lemur is a large primate found in the dry forests of Southern Madagascar. It is distinguished by its brownish-grey fur, and tail with black and white rings.

Typically, these are highly social creatures that live in groups of around 20 individuals. Unlike others in their family, ring-tailed lemurs can tolerate extreme environments-like the hottest, driest and the coldest climates in Madagascar.

But what is not-so-interesting about ring-tailed lemurs is their population. With the number falling to less than 2000 in the wild, they have been categorised as endangered by the IUCN Red List.

The main threat facing them is habitat destruction. Reports suggest that much of their habitat is converted to agricultural

Ring-tailed Lemurs



AMAZING

I'm working out!

In order to dry themselves off, Galapagos sea lions roll on the sand.

Galapagos Sea Lion

farmlands, or harvested for charcoal production. Then there are as well dangers of hunting for food and pet trade.

However, lemurs are very well bred in captivity. It is said that over a 1000 can be found across 140 zoos in the world.

What makes Galapagos sea lions endangered animals?

The Galapagos sea lion is a coastal animal that breeds in the Galapagos Islands, as the name suggests. But some of them are also spotted on the Isla de la Plata, close to mainland Ecuador. These animals are most noted for their playful and social nature.They are seen in waters, sandy beaches and rocky areas that connect to waters.

Typically, sea lions have smooth and streamlined bodies. It makes them smart hunters, especially of sardines. The animals are as well brilliant divers that can dive up to depths of 200 metres.

However, in spite of their smartness, Galapagos sea lions face serious challenges for survival. The natural predators of these animals are sharks and killer whales. But their main threat is the El Nino event which disturbs the marine life on which they depend.

Many of the animals migrat-

ed, while several others died of starvation. Other than El Nino, sea lions are also vulnerable to threats caused by humans.

Currently, there are just less than 50,000 Galapagos sea lions alive.

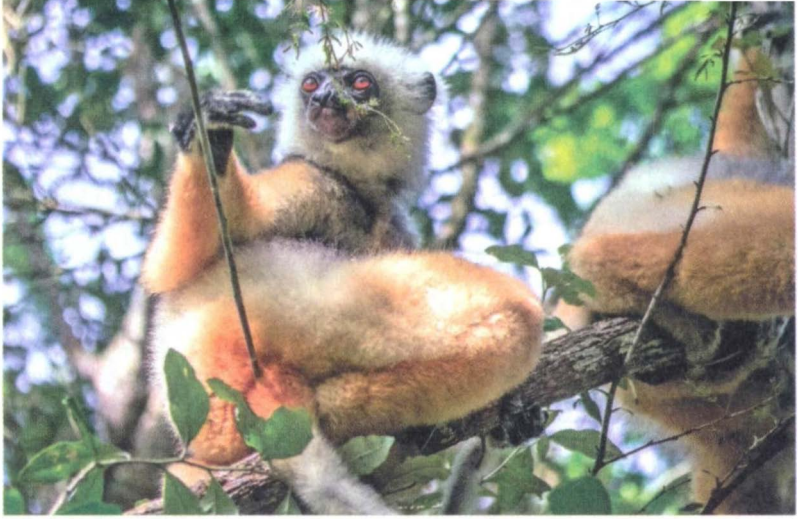
Geometric Tortoise

Why is the geometric tortoise an endangered animal?

The geometric tortoise is one of the most endangered reptiles on Earth, endemic to the Western Cape of South Africa. Its name arises from the geometric pattern that is seen on its high, domed shell. Typically, these shells are brown or black, with yellow stripes. Female tortoises can be identified by their larger size, and smaller tails.

What brings geometric turtles into the spotlight is their decreasing population. They are critically endangered according to the IUCN Red List. It is said that more than 90 per cent of the habitats where the tortoises reside have been destroyed in the past years, which in turn, has led to their decline. In addition to this, the introduction of invasive alien vegetation, and animals like feral and wild pigs, have further led to habitat crises and competition for food.

The hapless animals are also occasionally eaten by locals, or sought after for the pet trade. All these together have made it quite tough for this species to survive. At present, there are less than 3000 geometric tortoises alive.



Diademed Sifaka

What makes the diademed sifaka rare?

The diademed sifaka, though it might sound totally new to most of us, is a critically endangered member of the lemur family that is seen only in certain rainforests of eastern Madagascar.

Typically, these primates have bare dark grey or black faces framed with white hair. There is also a patch of black seen on top of their heads. Since the head resembles a diadem or an ornamental crown, the animals are called diadem sifakas. The long silky fur and the orange or golden coloration, altogether make the primate strikingly attractive.

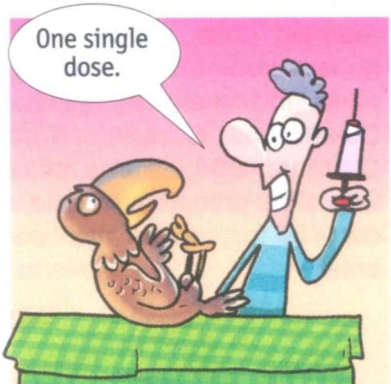
The main threats before a diademed sifaka is destruction of habitat. Being very sensitive to even the slightest disturbance, sifakas vanish from the areas very soon. In addition to deforestation, they are also hunted for food. It has been reported that hunting happens even inside national parks and other reserves. The Duke Lemur Centre in North Carolina, USA, is one place where the primates are held in captivity for conservation and breeding.

ENDANGERED BIRDS

Why is the steppe eagle an endangered bird?

Like animals on land and water, birds in the sky too are equally vulnerable to survival threats.

One among the endangered birds is the steppe eagle. It is a widespread migratory species that breeds in Eastern Europe,



Steppe Eagle

Central Asia, and Mongolia.

In winters, they fly to Africa and Southwestern Asia. They mostly inhabit steppe, semi-desert areas, and lowland hills.

Although considered to be common throughout its ranges, the population of steppe eagle shows a dropping trend.

The major threats before these attractive birds are conversion of habitats into agricultural land, and collision with power lines. The species has already become extinct in countries like Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine.

In a study conducted in 2014,

it was found that steppe eagles are negatively affected by the veterinary use of a drug named diclofenac, which is used to treat livestock. Being scavengers, the birds have high chances of being exposed to the risk of diclofenac poisoning.

Why is the swift parrot rare?

The swift parrot is a fast-flying migratory bird that breeds in Tasmania, along the Southeastern coast. It is a brightly coloured bird in a grass green shade, with a red beak. While flying, these birds are distinguished by their striking red underwings.

It has been seen that in autumn, swift parrots migrate to mainland Australia, and in winter, to the inland slopes of the Great Dividing Range.

What brings these parrots into spotlight is their population. With less than 2500 individuals, they have been declared as a critically endangered species in the IUCN Red List.

There are many reasons attributed to the decline of swift parrot population. The most serious one is the clearing of trees.

Besides this, there are as well predators like the sugar gliders who kill the parrots.

Swift Parrots

Swift Parrot

Wild swift parrots are migratory birds that can travel very long distances.

By nature, they are less aggressive and more gentler.

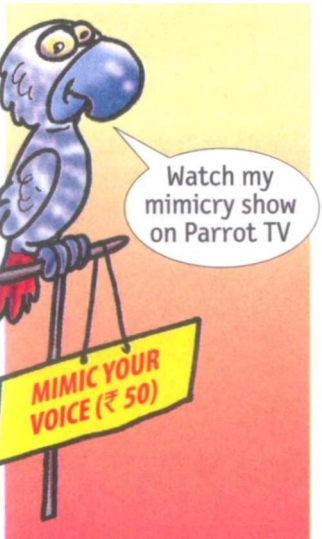
● *Sneha Rao*

The Australian Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 has listed swift parrots as endangered.

Why is the African grey parrot endangered?

The African grey parrot is one of the largest parrots in the continent, most noted for its intelligence, and ability to mimic human speech.

The species can be found across tropical Africa. They mainly inhabit primary and secondary lowland forests there.



African Grey Parrot

The parrots are infamous for damaging maize crops, but they mainly feed on fruits, seeds and nuts, particularly those of the oil-palm.

The intelligence of a grey parrot is such that they can easily mimic human speech, and learn number sequences. A famous example is Alex, the captive parrot that could utter over 100 words, differentiating between colours, materials, objects and shapes.

However, these birds are often exploited for the pet trade. Another major issue is the loss of nesting areas. According to a study conducted in 2016, the population of these parrots has declined by more than 90 per cent in Ghana due to poaching for pet trade and habitat loss.

STAR FACT

Thieves!

Red-headed vultures are infamous for stealing food from other members of their extended family, especially from the smaller Egyptian vultures.

Red-headed Vulture

There are many efforts made to conserve the species, including banning of their export, increased monitoring etc. Salonga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo is one place where the birds are protected.

Why is it said that the red-headed vulture population is decreasing because of poisoning?

Red-headed vultures, or the Asian king vultures, are wild birds native to the Indian subcontinent. Typically, they feed on the decaying flesh of dead animals.

Although once seen throughout the Indian subcontinent and South-east Asia, these vultures have undergone a serious decline in population and range. They can be seen in some areas of India, especially in the west Himalayan foothills, and rarely in Pakistan, Laos and Nepal.

There are many reasons attributed to the falling population of red-headed vultures. One of the most important reason is poisoning. Scientists say that the serious fall in population that occurred in the 1990s was caused by the presence of diclofenac. It is a veterinary drug that used to treat

livestock. Those vultures that fed on the dead bodies of these livestock, soon died. This unfortunate series of events is said to have reduced the number of vultures by half.

Why is the sooty albatross an endangered bird?

Sooty albatrosses are a type of albatross that spend most of their time in the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. They nest on islands there.

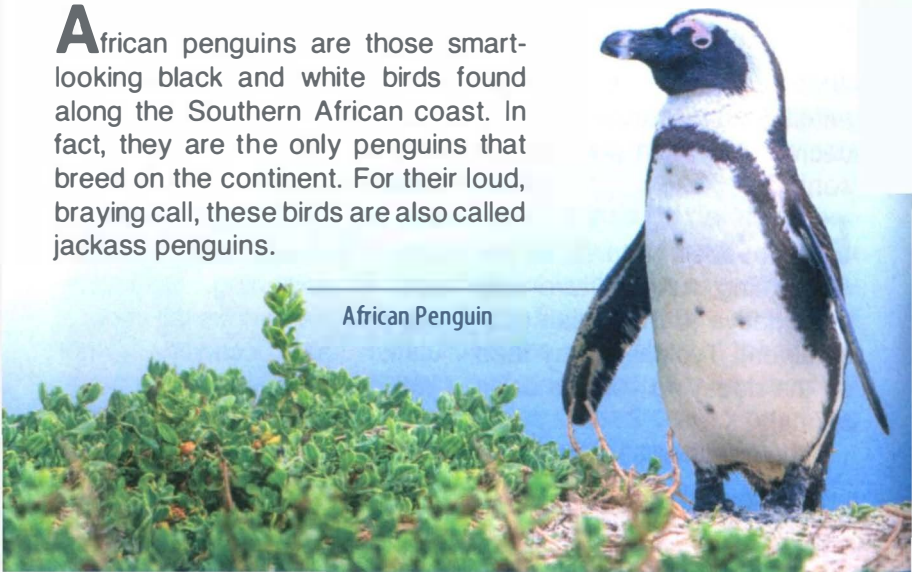
The interesting name of these birds comes from the sooty brown colour of their feathers.

Like many other species, sooty albatrosses are endangered too. Scientists say that the decline in their population has happened over three generations, or 90 years. The reasons for this are many. One of them is the introduction of rats that consume the eggs of these birds. When uncontrolled, this slowly affects the population in that area. The birds are also highly vulnerable to avian cholera, and infections like erysipelas, caused by bacteria.

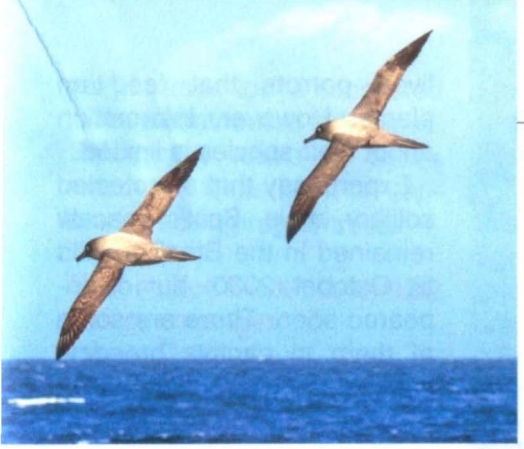
Another reason is pollution caused by plastics, oil and

Why is the African penguin rare?

African penguins are those smart-looking black and white birds found along the Southern African coast. In fact, they are the only penguins that breed on the continent. For their loud, braying call, these birds are also called jackass penguins.



African Penguin



Sooty Albatrosses

chemicals, which affect the albatrosses negatively.

Besides, there are also reports suggesting that many of these birds are injured or killed accidentally by fishing gear in the water.

They breed only on the 24 islands situated between Hollamsbird Island in Namibia, and Bird Island in Algoa Bay, South Africa.

The sad news is that the population of the African penguins shows a decreasing trend. As per recent surveys, there aren't more than 70,000 individuals surviving.

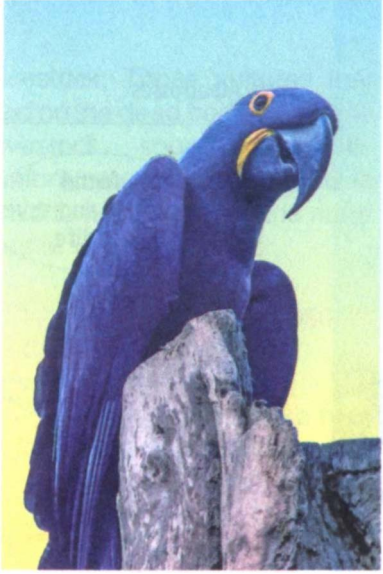
Organisations like Dyer Island Conservation Trust, SAMREC and Raggy Charters with the Penguin Research Fund in Port Elizabeth are working towards saving the birds from extinction.

CURIOUS FACT

Diving Champ!

It is said that on an average, African penguins can dive 30 metres, but sometimes, as deep as 130 metres too. They can also hold their breath for around two and a half minutes while diving.

• *Ryan Thomas*



Spix's Macaw

Why is the Spix's macaw considered to be critically endangered?

A Spix's macaw is one of the rarest birds in the world that is native to Brazil. It is a critically endangered parrot that is believed to be extinct in the wild. The last individual was spotted in 2000, but there are reports suggesting that one more was found in 2016.

Physically, macaws are elegant birds with blue-grey plumage and bright tails. They are said to be relatively long-lived parrots that feed on plants. However, information about their species is limited.

Experts say that a protected solitary male Spix's macaw remained in the Brazilian wild till October 2000, but disappeared soon. There are some of them in captive breeding centres across the world. As of 2015, there were about 110 individuals.

The main threat that is thought to have caused the extinction of Spix's macaws is the destruction of habitats. Ille-

gal pet trade too is suspected to have contributed to the loss.

Now, the future of Spix's macaws is dependent on captive breeding programmes.

What makes the white-headed vulture endangered?

The white-headed vulture is a wild bird found in the hot, dry woodland and tree savannas of Africa. Nevertheless, their population is dangerously low.

Typically, white-headed vultures are colourful birds with a pink face and bright orange-red beak. Their name comes from the downy, white feathers on their head, which give it a sharp appearance. Like other vultures, these birds too feed on the dead bodies of large animals. But they are capable of killing small prey as well. It is known that the beak of a vulture is sharp enough to pierce and tear apart a prey.

But more than ferocity, it is the population drop that brings a white-headed vulture to international attention. The IUCN Red List has classified this species as critically endangered, owing to a decreasing trend in their number.

The reasons attributed to this fall are many. The shortage of suitable food sources, loss of habitat, and illegal trade are a few of them.

Besides, many have died in the past due to the presence of toxic substances like diclofenac in food. It is a veterinary drug used to treat livestock, but affects vultures adversely. To avoid more deaths, most of their ranges are now protected by governments.

White-headed Vulture

Philippine Eagle

Why is the Philippine eagle considered as endangered?

The Philippine eagle is the world's largest eagle, found exclusively in Philippines. It is known to be the greatest raptor alive, preying on monkeys, flying lemurs, rats, snakes, squirrels, birds and bats. The bird can be spotted only on four islands- Samar, Leyte, Luzon, and Mindanao. It is also revered as the national bird of Philippines.

Typically, the Philippine eagles have very long wings that grow up to two metres. They are distinguished by their 'mane' of brown and white feathers on the head. The species, which was once widespread throughout the islands, have become largely endangered over the past few decades. The present population is estimated to be between 250 and 750, making them a critically endangered species.

Mascot

A Philippine eagle named 'Gilas' was the official mascot of the 2005 Southeast Asian Games, held in Manila.

Clearing of the vast tracts of tropical rainforests for commercial development and cultivation has led to the destruction of eagle habitats.

The country offers protection to the birds, making it illegal to kill or trade them.

Why is the California condor considered to be endangered?

California condors are among the largest flying birds in the world that are native to North America. They were once seen in many parts of the continent, from California and other Pacific states to Texas, Florida, and New York. But today, the species is critically endangered in existence.

California Condor

Physically, the condors are just magnificent. While flying, their wings spread more than 2.7 metres from one tip to the other. It is said that these birds can fly above 4000 metres, and glide for hours without even beating their wings. Like all other vultures, these wild birds too, feed on dead animal meat.

However, the population of California con-

Eat like a Condor!

California condors generally have a huge appetite. After a large meal, the birds also need rest for a couple of hours, to get ready for the next round of flight.

dors has been under threat for years. During the 20th century, it declined steadily, till a point where only 22 individuals remained in the world. Subsequently, they were taken into captivity towards the end of the 1980s in order to save the species. It is said that there were no California condors in the wild between 1988 and 1991. In the following years, birds were reintroduced to their natural habitats. This process helped, and as of now, there are around 435 individuals in the world.

Galapagos Penguin

What makes Galapagos penguins special?

The Galapagos penguins are the only penguin species found north of the equator, and in the Galapagos. With an estimated population of less than 2000 individuals, the species is said to be endangered.

Typically, Galapagos penguins have black-grey upperparts and whitish under parts, with two black bands across the chest. Unlike cold water penguins, they have several adaptations that allow them to survive in warmer climates. The birds mainly feed on krill and small crustaceans.

As we saw, the population of Galapagos penguins is shrinking. The obvious threats to

STAR FACT

Himalayan Task!

As part of the first vulture re-introduction programme in Asia, two captive Himalayan Griffon vultures were released into the wild in June 2016 from the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre, Pinjore.

Indian Vulture

their survival are pollution caused by chemicals and oil in waters, climate change, and accidental capture by fishing nets etc.

In addition, the birds are also vulnerable to attacks and diseases from introduced species like cats, dogs and rats. However, the danger posed by El Nino events are the worst.

Why are the numbers of the Indian vulture declining?

Not many of us find vultures attractive or friendly. Rather, they look a little threatening. But these birds, we should know, play a very important role in the food chain- they feed on animal carcasses, and prevent the spread of deadly bacteria and fungus into the ground and water.

Sadly, the population of the vulture species is falling at an alarming rate. One of the birds that is facing the risk of extinction is the Indian vulture. It is a wild bird, native to India, Pakistan, and Nepal.

Like others, Indian vultures too, feed on dead bodies. They can be spotted in cities, towns, and villages near cultivated and open areas, and in woodlands too.

As per the IUCN Red List, Indian vultures are critically endangered, with a population of around 30,000. A serious decline in their numbers happened in the 1990s, when they lost around 95 per cent of the individuals.

This unnatural death toll was caused by the presence of diclofenac, a drug used to treat livestock.

Blue-throated Macaw

What makes the blue-throated macaw rare?

The blue-throated macaw is a rare parrot that can be spotted only in the northern parts of Bolivia in South America. They mostly inhabit palm groves and savannas in the northern parts of the country. With their turquoise blue and yellow plumage, blue cheeks, and long elegant tails, the macaws are unusually attractive. However, we just don't get to see them at all!

It is said that until the 1970s, blue-throated macaws mostly remained unknown. But as soon as they became popular, the illegal trade of these birds began. The fact that the species is rare made them all the more expensive and sought-after in the international pet market.

The trade became so intense

that at one point, there weren't any wild specimen. Luckily, by 1992, the birds were rediscovered. However, the wild population of blue-throated macaws still remains fragmented, and as low as 400!

Why is the Madagascar heron special?

The Madagascar heron is a rare and large grey heron that is endemic to the island of Madagascar. Also known as the Humblot's heron, they are birds that have an endangered existence due to hunting and loss of habitat.

In appearance, these herons are distinctive, with dull grey plumage, and long pointed beaks. Mostly they are seen standing solitary and motionless in shallow waters, a habitat they are perfectly adapted for.

As said earlier, Madagascar herons are rare birds that are now facing the threat of extinction. The main reason for this is the conversion of wetland habitats in the country for rice cultivation. As a result, the birds are

Night Sight

Many herons are known to have a very good eyesight that helps them to hunt during the day, as well as night.

Madagascar Heron

forced out of their habitats to an unsafe existence. In addition, there are other problems too, like the stealing of heron eggs, and the capture of nestlings by local people for food.

As of now, the population of the heron is just between 1000 and 1500.

Why is the red-crowned crane is an endangered animal?

The red-crowned crane is one of the rarest cranes in the world that is found in Japan, China and the Korean Peninsula. They are known to be very attractive birds with mostly white feathers, and a black tail. Their name comes from the red feathers on top of their head.

The birds are mostly spotted in wetlands, rivers, mudflats, grassy tidal flats, and paddy fields. With a population of less than 3000, the red-crowned cranes have become an endangered species. Habitat destruction is the primary threat they face.

Red-crowned Crane

Yet another is the threat of poisoning. Reports suggest that the birds are often killed by eating pesticide-treated grains.

In addition to these grave

issues, there are also instances of fire and poaching that contribute to the decline of red-headed crane population.

There are many efforts made by wildlife organisations towards conserving the species, like increasing the scope of wetland restoration and controlling invasive species.

What makes the Lear's macaw a rare bird?

The Lear's macaw is a large parrot endemic to Northeastern part of Bahia in Brazil. It is named after Edward Lear, a famous British artist cum poet who painted macaws, and wrote rhymes about them.

For a long time, the macaw remained elusive in the wild. It was in 1978 that it was accepted as a distinct species by naturalist Helmut Sick.

Typically, Lear's macaws are very noisy and social. Their diet comprises of fruits, seeds, and nuts. The overall grayish-blue plumage, long wings and tail, and a distinct vibrant yellowish-orange colour that encircle the eyes-altogether make the bird beautiful.

Lear's Macaw

CURIOUS FACT

Name is Lear!

Lear's macaw was first described by French ornithologist Charles Lucien Bonaparte in 1856. It was named after Edward Lear, the artist who made many drawings of the bird.

The most serious threat faced by the macaws is illegal trade. It is said that collectors of these birds pay high prices in the international pet market to own them.

Another threat is the reduction in the number of licuri palms which the birds mostly feed on. Together, these have all contributed to the decline of Lear's macaws.

Why is the Malagasy pond heron an endangered bird?

The Malagasy pond heron is a migratory bird, seen primarily in the outer islands of the Seychelles, Madagascar, and countries on the east coast of Africa such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. It is also called a Madagascar pond heron, or Madagascar squacco heron. The species in general has long crest, red legs, blue beak with a red tip and blue bare skin around the eyes. Strangely, the plumage of the birds becomes streaked with brown, and the crown turns completely brown when the species is not breeding.

The habitats of the herons can be seen in freshwater wet-

Malagasy Pond Heron

lands, typically with nearby tree-cover.

In 2007, the IUCN Red List classified the Madagascar pond heron as an endangered species. It was the result of a population decline caused mainly by over-harvesting of eggs, and the clearing of habitats. In addition to these, there is also a competition for food and habitat with other herons too. This also caused the decline in their number.

Why are the numbers of the Vietnamese pheasant declining?

The Vietnamese, or the Vo Quy's pheasant, is a rare pheasant that is endemic to Central Vietnam. The range of this bird concentrates around the Ke Go Nature Reserve in Ha Tinh province.

The pheasant was discovered in 1964, and described in the year that followed, by the Vietnamese zoologist Vo Quy. Hence, it was named after him.

Typically, the male pheasant is more attractive than the female. It has a shiny black plumage with dark blue tones, and blue-edged feathers on the body. The female is rather unattractive with plain, greyish-brown plumage. It is said that they mostly feed on grain, seeds, plants and insects.

Vietnamese Pheasant

According to the IUCN Red List, Vietnamese pheasants are an endangered species. The destruction of coastal lowlands, and commercial logging are among the main factors that contribute to the population fall.

Besides, a considerable number of these birds are hunted for trade and meat.

ANIMAL QUIZ

Here's a contest for our readers.

Seen on the right are the National Animals of some countries. Can you name the country for each animal?

All you need to do is to send us an e-mail, naming the country against each number.

(PLEASE GIVE YOUR POSTAL ADDRESS ALSO IN THE E-MAIL)

You are also welcome to send your answers by post.

Ten winners will be awarded prizes.

In case there are more than ten correct entries, the winners will be chosen by lot.

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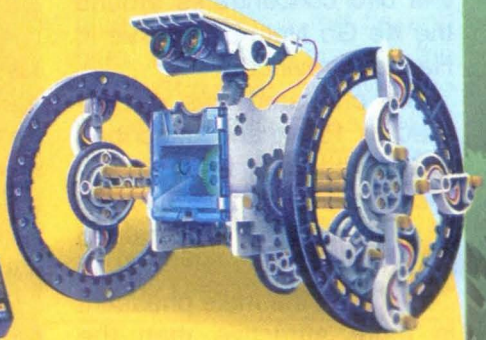

Springbok

Grey Wolf

Malayan Tiger

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If you are sending your entry by post, superscribe this on your envelope.

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Please enter **ANIMAL QUIZ** in the subject line of your email.

Last date to receive entries: **2017 APRIL 25**

Corrections & Clarifications

Vishnu Bhagirathan, Kochi, points out a correction to the Tell Me Why issue on Story of Electricity (March). He refers to the mention on Page 7, where it is wrongly stated that 1 coulomb is equivalent to 6.242 x 1018 e. In fact, it is equivalent to the charge of 6.242 x 10^{18} protons.

Mainak Chaudhuri, West Bengal, points out a mistake from the same issue. He points out the mistake on Page 13, where it is stated that many equipments like generators can run using alternating current. Actually, generators are not run by AC ,but they are used to produce alternating current or AC.

Thank you readers for your valuable feedback.

- Editor

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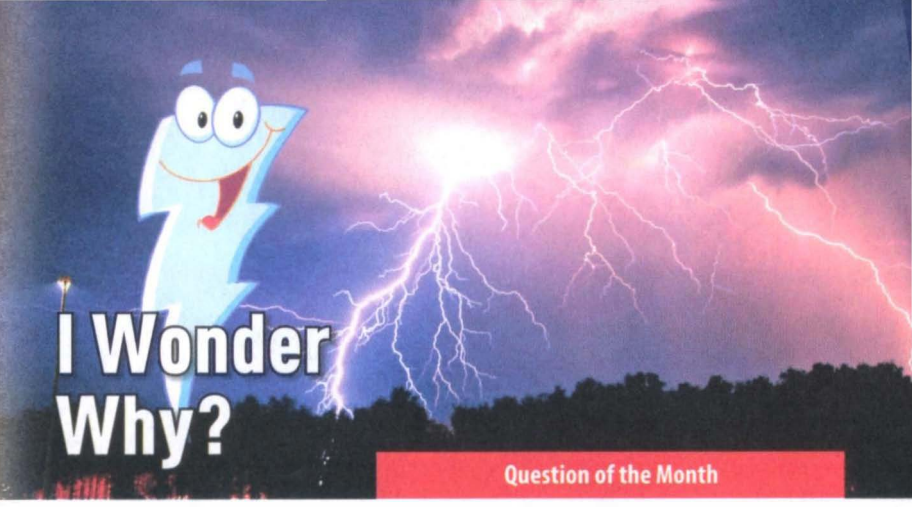


I Wonder Why?

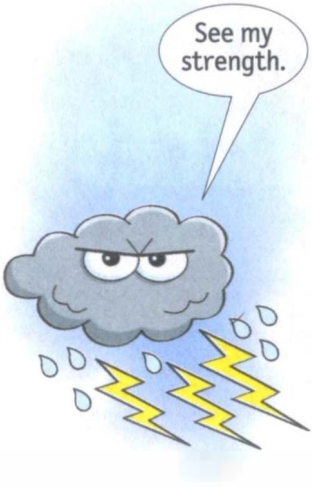
Question of the Month

Why is lightning always zigzag in shape?

Lightning has always been a curious phenomenon. The most interesting thing about lightning is its shape. It's always in a zigzag shape. Why is this so?

The answer is simple. As we all know, lightning is an electric current. An electric current has a tendency to follow the path of least resistance, i.e., the path where there would be minimal opposition to its flow.

Apparently, the air through which lightning passes is made up of many things. It contains many particles like gases, dust etc. That is why, when lightning is formed, it chooses the path that has the least possible resistance. This is the reason for lightning's zigzag shape.



Question sent by:
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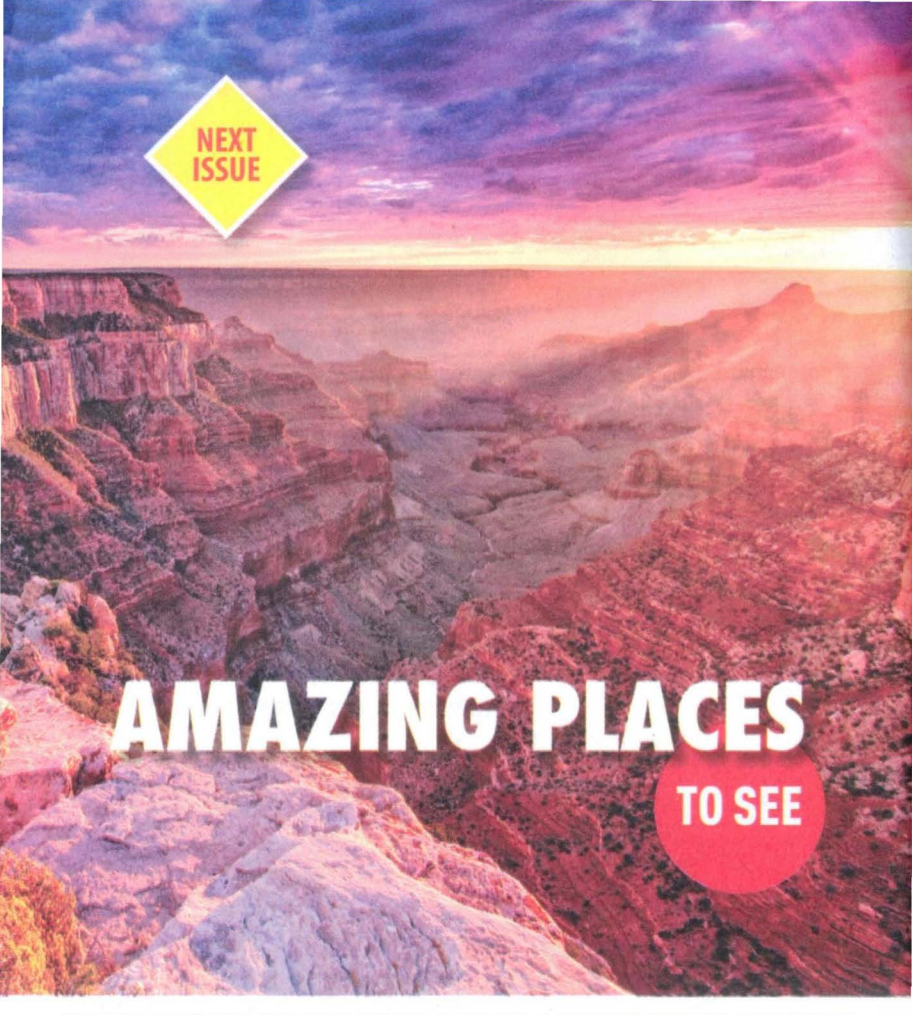

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